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DUNGEON™

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Dungeons & Dragons
Acquisitions Incorporated
You are momentarily startled by a cloud of white doves flying up over the fields.
"You don't know how many times I've seen these doves."

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DUNGEON May 2009

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Players 1, Dungeon Masters 1

Dragon and *Dungeon* have been ticking along for many years now, with only a few editorial direction changes to speak of, most of them to do with D&D edition changes. *Dungeon* has traditionally offered D&D adventures, while *Dragon* has been the place to go for all sorts of DM- and player-focused articles related to the D&D game. As someone who recently passed the ten-year benchmark working on D&D (most of it on these magazines), I'm very respectful of the magazines' legacy, as is the rest of Wizards of the Coast. Even with the transition to a digital format, the content—and more important to this discussion, where it lived—remained the same.

But now, we have a year of 4th Edition under our belts, and we've taken a good, hard look at the magazines and the content we release. In a few months (we're not ready to talk about specific dates yet), we're going to refocus the content of *Dragon* and *Dungeon* with the goal of giving players and DMs exciting and useful 4th Edition material in a clear-cut, intuitive way. In the new world order, *Dragon* will become the hub for all your player needs, and *Dungeon* will become the hub for all your DM needs.

In addition to presenting D&D adventures of varying lengths as well as DM advice columns such as "Dungeoncraft" and "Save My Game," *Dungeon* will also include recurring features for DMs that have traditionally been under *Dragon*'s aegis. Ecologies, Demonomicons, Bestiaries—they've been in *Dragon* because they've always been there, but not because they *should* be.

Dragon will, in turn, retain its player-focused general features, and we'll begin a monthly series of meaty feature articles that home in on individual classes. These features will be aimed at giving players new tools and exciting options for their characters, and we'll run several of them each month. This means players of every class will be able to find multiple articles dedicated to improving their experience at the table.

This change represents a shift in how we organize our content—something that will be easy to explain to new players while still preserving the breadth of material readers are accustomed to seeing. Such a change (*Dungeon* for DMs, *Dragon* for players) has been discussed for years, dating back to the early days of 3rd Edition, but never carried out for a multitude of reasons. Chief among them was the concern over what would happen to the *Dragon* subscription and sales numbers once there was no longer any reason for DMs to buy it. *Dragon* was always the more popular magazine, since it appealed to DMs and players alike. At least one person at the table each month would find something of interest. But now that the magazines both come with one subscription, that reason has gone the way of the gorbel.

It sounds like a bigger deal than it really is, because the only place you'll see a difference is in your monthly compilations or in our online archives. This shift mimics a core 4th Edition goal we've already applied to print and accessory products, which strive to clearly describe whether they're intended for DM or player use. Just as you won't see paragon paths in a *Dungeon Master's Guide* or world-building information in a *Player's Handbook*, all subscribers will clearly know what they're getting when they download *Dragon* or *Dungeon* content.

What this does *not* mean is a reduction in the overall volume of content each month. If anything, we'll be bringing you *more* exclusive content as a *D&D Insider*. All your favorites will still be around, and we'll continue to listen to your input as well. We'll have more information on our ever-evolving content plans in the coming weeks, but this is my big announcement for the month. Check back with us again soon for more *D&D Insider* news.

If you have any comments or questions, feel free to drop us a line at dndinsider@wizards.com. We'd love to hear from you.

PARAGON
11-20

"In this war, we face not only mortal danger, but a more sinister attack—an assault against our hearts and minds. The githyanki threaten to drive us to defeat through neglect and treachery. Neglect as we refuse to take the bold steps we must to survive, and treachery as our enemies lead astray those who could be our allies, and mobilize them against us."

–Amyria,
appealing to the Coalition

Throne of the Stone-Skinned King

SCALES OF WAR

By Logan Bonner

illustrations by John Stanko ✦ cartography by Sean MacDonald

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Background

The githyanki built a network of allies across many planes before beginning their attacks, and one of these is Cachlain, a powerful fomorian known as the Stone-Skinned King. From his secluded lair, he provides transport for the forces of evil. Like the Elsir Vale, though to a lesser extent, Cachlain's realm contains portals to different planes and locations. Though the githyanki possess many means of transport, the Stone-Skinned King's portals are especially worrisome, since they connect to lands near several cities of the Coalition. The fomorian has established total control over the portals, using rituals that took decades to take effect; no one passes through one of the portals without Cachlain's seal.

Cachlain, the fomorian king, rules a subterranean complex of caverns, much of it chipped from great crystals and shaped by cyclops slaves into immaculate, enormous corridors and rooms. Cachlain is particularly fond of beautiful magical craft, and his citadel is filled with arcane torches and doorways that open on command. Constructs are his favorite marvel, and he has many throughout his realm. Once, when the king was in an especially mad mood, he had a stone golem pried apart, and its stone armor affixed to his skin. This gave him his name.

Cachlain's assistance came only recently, after a human named Sovacles replaced the king's former advisor. Sovacles urged cooperation with the githyanki, and he holds great influence over Cachlain's decision-making. No one is certain where Sovacles came from, or how he ended up in the fomorian's court.

The Coalition's war council found out about the troop transports, but it doesn't know how many troops are moving through, or what Cachlain is gaining for his assistance. They also know that Cachlain provided the *Seed of Winter* to the invaders in "Alliance at Nefelus." Rumors have spread that he wants the *Seed of Winter* back. Furthermore, he has been using a portal that connects the Feywild to a region near where the Elsir River flows from the mountains. His underlings have been taking slaves from the Elsir Vale recently, then transporting them through the portal into a grove that lies on the outskirts of Cachlain's realm.

Meanwhile, the war council has been thrown into an uproar in the PCs' absence. Enemy forces have killed two members, Lord Torrance of Sayre and Kalad of Overlook. The war council needs a new leader, and it has two empty seats.

Adventure Synopsis

The PCs return to Sayre from Nefelus, bearing the *Seed of Winter*. The members seek a leader to head a new war council that will oversee all the armies involved in the war. The PCs engage in a skill challenge, where they nominate their preferred candidate (most likely Amyria). Then, the council discusses the fomorian king Cachlain. For some time, the evil forces' troops have been traveling through the Feywild and to the world using the natural gates within his dark domain, and spies have discovered that the *Seed of Winter* was given to Nefelus's enemies by the fomorian. The PCs are sent to the court to find out what he's getting for his help and to try to make him to leave the conflict, or even switch sides. They carry the *Seed of Winter* as a bargaining chip.

After following Cachlain's slavers to find a portal to the Feywild, and obtaining the fomorian's seal from those slavers, the PCs enter the Feywild. They're soon attacked by firbolgs, who want to return the PCs and

The Quests

As the PCs pursue the central goals of "Throne of the Stone-Skinned King," they have several opportunities for picking up minor tasks from potential allies.

Major Quest—End Cachlain's Interference
Enemies of the PCs have allied with Cachlain, the Stone-Skinned King, so they can use the magical portals of his Feywild kingdom as a staging area for raids. The PCs travel to the fomorian king's realm, where they must convince him (through diplomacy or force) to stop allowing githyanki troops to travel through his domain.
Reward: 8,000 XP.

Minor Quest—Assist the Eladrin
A group of eladrin seeks to end their enmity with Cachlain and form an alliance. After the PCs meet these eladrin, they can help them achieve this goal.
Reward: 1,600 XP.

Minor Quest—Turn Bram Ironfell
The PCs meet Bram Ironfell of House Karak once more, now serving as an ambassador for the githyanki. If the PCs can turn him to the side of good, he could be a valuable ally in the future.
Reward: 1,400 XP.

Minor Quest—Speak to Talyrin
Sovacles, Cachlain's new advisor, turned the king against his cyclops advisor Talyrin when he took over. She's imprisoned somewhere near Cachlain's throne room, and if the PCs find her prison, they can gain her as an ally against Sovacles.
Reward: 1,400 XP.

the *Seed of Winter* to followers of Inzira, the Daughter of Frostwhite Forest, who claims to be the proper owner of the artifact. The eladrin general seeks an alliance with Cachlain, fearing the machinations of Sangwyr—a fomorian upstart and their mutual enemy. The general allows the PCs to borrow the *Seed of Winter* and go to Cachlain's court, hoping they can form an alliance one way or another.

When they reach Cachlain's realm, they meet with the king and his advisor Sovacles, and they discover that Sovacles nearly controls the king. Rebuffed for the time being, the PCs must await another audience with the king. As they explore the court, they discover the sheer number of troops traveling through the domain, and that the forces of evil have promised to spy on Cachlain's enemies in exchange for his help. Bram Ironfell, from "The Lost Mines of Karak" (*Dungeon*® 159), reappears as an ambassador to the court from the githyanki. The PCs can also meet a cyclops oracle who formerly advised Cachlain, but now lies imprisoned in a hidden jail. Cachlain's rival sends assassins to slaughter the PCs.

The assassination attempt foreshadows an assault that happens soon after, as the fomorian rival attempts to seize Cachlain's domain. As the PCs help fight them off, Bram Ironfell's moment of truth approaches, and the PCs' actions determine whether he becomes a foe or ally.

The PCs learn that Sovacles had something to do with the invasion, and they confront the advisor. However, the advisor still has Cachlain under control and has convinced him that the PCs were responsible for the attacks. As the PCs battle Sovacles and Cachlain, the advisor reveals that he works for Tiamat. Enraged at this news, Cachlain drops the PCs and Sovacles into a gladiatorial arena below the throne room. Sovacles reveals his true form as a powerful shapeshifter and exarch of Tiamat.

If the PCs succeed, they convince Cachlain to form an unlikely alliance with the eladrin, who receive the *Seed of Winter* as a token of the agreement. The PCs also find hints that the githyanki's efforts on their world have suffered serious setbacks in recent weeks, and their forces are preparing to consolidate at their largest stronghold.

Preparing for Adventure

"Throne of the Stone-Skinned King" takes the PCs into the dark places of the Feywild and involves them in political intrigue. They go through several skill challenges as the PCs try to find solutions to the difficult, uncertain situations caused by the war.

What You Need to Play

Descriptions of the different segments of the adventure follow, and tactical encounter complete with stat blocks and maps give you everything you need to run each encounter. If you aren't sure how to use the tactical encounter format, see a previous Scales of War adventure, such as "Alliance at Nefelus."

Treasure Preparation

"Throne of the Stone-Skinned King" uses the treasure parcel system described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The PCs should gain a total of fifteen treasure parcels. The Treasure Parcels sidebar lists the most likely places to find parcels, so you can fill in the blanks with the parcel numbers noted below. The magic items should come from the players' wish lists, with most of the higher-level items appearing in parcels found later in the adventure, and the 20th-level magic item found on Virizan's body.

Treasure Parcels

Parcel A: _____, SC1. The Coalition's Leader.
Parcel B: _____, A1. Slay the Slavers.
Parcel C: _____, A1. Slay the Slavers.
Parcel D: _____, A4. Battle Camp Raid.
Parcel E: Parcel 7, B3. Assassination Attempt.
Parcel F: _____, B3. Assassination Attempt.
Parcel G: _____, B1. Disrupted Banquet.
Parcel H: Parcel 2, B4. Caged Animals.
Parcel I: _____, B6. Arena of Blood.
Parcel J: _____, B6. Arena of Blood.

Based on the guidelines in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the following parcels can go in the spaces above. Rely on the wish lists your players gave you for the first six parcels.

Parcel 1: Magic item, level 20.
Parcel 2: Magic weapon, level 19.
Parcel 3: Magic item, level 19.
Parcel 4: Magic item, level 18.
Parcel 5: Magic item, level 18.
Parcel 6: Magic item, level 17.
Parcel 7: Four platinum bars minted in Tu'narath, each worth 9,000 gp (36,000 gp total).
Parcel 8: An emerald faceted by cyclops experts (15,000 gp) and 170 pp.
Parcel 9: Bag of precious gems worth a total of 16,500 gp and 10,000 gp.
Parcel 10: 300 pp.

Vital Information

This adventure reveals Scales of War's true villain: Tiamat, the god of greed, wealth, and envy. If you're running the adventure path, make sure the players find out the following plot points.

- Kalad and Lord Torrance of the Coalition were killed while the PCs were in Nefelus. Thrown into chaos, the Coalition requires new leadership. With Kalad gone, the Coalition also lost its best general.
- Cachlain, the fomorian king, has grown more aggressive. He takes slaves from areas that are under attack, and transports githyanki troops through his realm.
- The githyanki leave nothing when they invade, and they bring about the total destruction of any lands they conquer. Vlaakith, the Lich Queen, no longer leads the githyanki. (Bram Ironfell reveals these facts.)
- The fomorian named Sangwyr seeks to conquer Cachlain's realm, and only an alliance between Cachlain and Inzira, a noble eladrin, can keep him at bay. He would be a strong ally of the githyanki (and Tiamat).
- Sovacles is Virizan, one of Tiamat's exarchs, and Chillreaver (from "Alliance at Nefelus") was as well. Tiamat is helping the githyanki and is behind the githyanki attacks.
- The githyanki have outposts all across the world, but their largest is a fortress called Garaitha's Anvil, from which the githyanki launched their entire invasion from their home on the Astral Sea.

Starting the Adventure

As soon as the PCs return from Nefelus, they're summoned to meet with the leaders of the Coalition. The skill challenge (The Coalition's Leader) takes place over days or weeks, so the PCs have time to catch up with their allies amid the chaos of choosing a leader for the Coalition.

Return to the Coalition

When the PCs return, they find that the Coalition has been shaken up by several events. While the PCs and Amyria were absent, the politically savvy Lord Divian Torrance maneuvered to become the head of the council. The dwarf Kalad, one of the PCs most outspoken allies, had become an effective general for the coalition's armies, and had earned the enmity of the githyanki. While preparing for a battle near Sherrbyr, he was assassinated by the githyanki, and without his leadership the battle ended in defeat for the Coalition.

Shortly before the PCs finished their battles to save Nefelus, Torrance went missing. Githyanki from Garaitha's Anvil claimed he came to them as a representative of the council, seeking a diplomatic compromise to prevent further bloodshed. Seeing this as an affront and a threat, they killed Torrance for his arrogance.

Now, the Elsir Vale and Sayre seats on the Coalition are open, and the council lacks a leader. The head of Brindol's council, Eoffram Troyas, seeks both spots. Many people, both citizens of the Elsir Vale and influential people in other regions now ruled by the Coalition, have suggested Amyria as a replacement for either seat, and for a position as leader. The PCs take part in a skill challenge as they put forth a candidate they'd like to see on the council and run a brief campaign to put that person in power.

Skill Challenge: SC1: The Coalition's Leader (page 17).

Adventure Pacing

Both the skill challenge early in the adventure and the time the PCs spend in Cachlain's court can take whatever amount of time you feel is appropriate, and their durations are left vague. If your players are antsy, or worry that the githyanki danger can grow while the PCs spend time away from the world, bring on encounters or events in a more rapid succession.

News of the Stone-Skinned King

Regardless of who leads the Coalition's council, they have a task they want the PCs to undertake. The fomorian Cachlain, known as the Stone-Skinned King, allied with the githyanki. They have been funneling troops through his domain in the Underdark of the Feywild, taking advantage of the numerous portals to other lands that lie within it. Githyanki have moved more rapidly due to this, but no one is sure how severe the problem is. Caliandra has been tracking the situation in the Feywild and knows that Cachlain wants the *Seed of Winter*. The fomorian once believed it belonged to him, and Caliandra believes he lent it to aid those who attacked Nefelus.

The coalition wants to decipher Cachlain's motives and prevent him from helping the githyanki if possible. They believe the PCs are the only ones strong enough to safely travel to the king's domain and deal with him.

Enter the Feywild

Taking advantage of the chaos caused by the githyanki attacks, Cachlain has been sending underlings to the world to collect slaves for his court. By comparing the locations of a few raids in the Elsir Vale, the Coalition has guessed that the slavers have been traveling out of Rhest, a ruined city that was once the capitol of the kingdom of Rhestilor. Some explorers were trying to excavate the ruins, but no one's heard from them in a long time.

If the PCs go to the ruins, they find the cyclops slavers didn't take much care to cover their tracks. They hold slaves in a small room, preparing to take them back to Cachlain's court. By defeating the cyclopses, the PCs find the special ritual scroll given to the cyclopses to let them access a portal back to the Feywild. The slaves are all citizens from nearby towns in the Elsir Vale. If the PCs kill the slavers and set the slaves free, neither group will be missed—they're small potatoes to the fomorian king. He's more interested in the *Seed of Winter*.

Tactical Encounter: A1. Slay the Slavers (page 20).

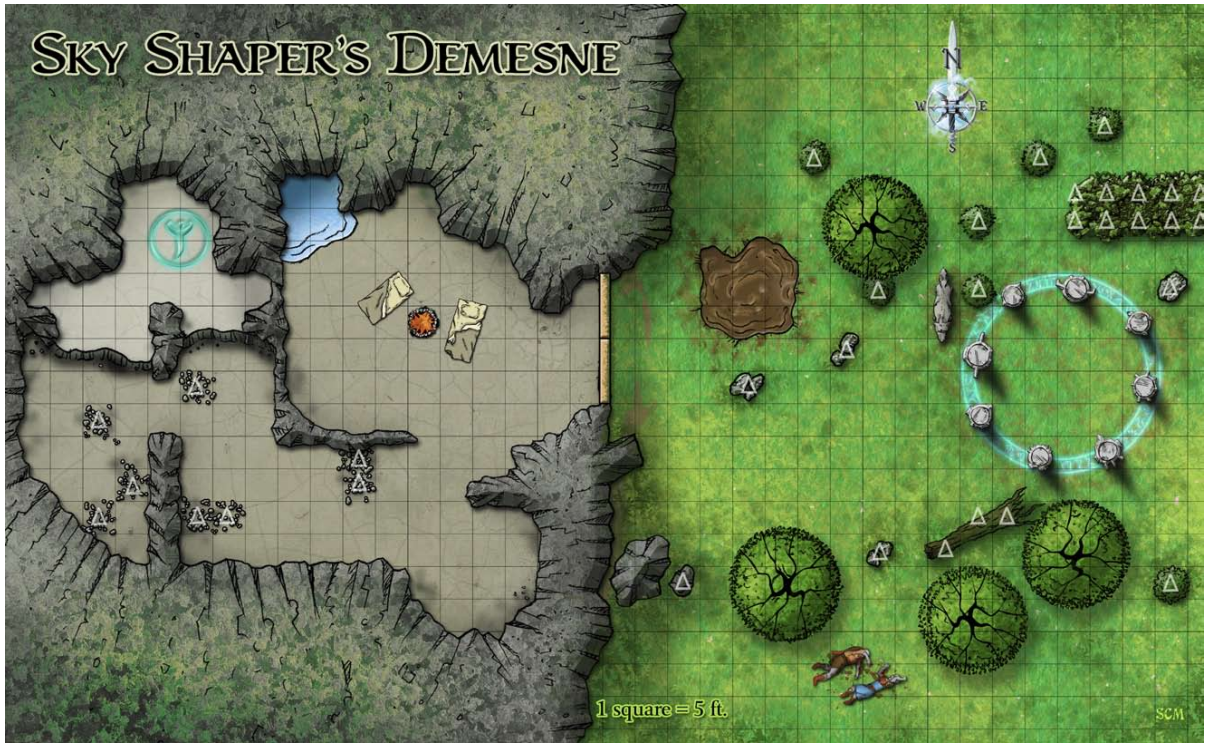
Firbolg Hunters

Once the PCs arrive in the Feywild, they find themselves inside a large circle surrounded by standing stones. This is the fey demesne of the Sky Shaper, an archfey who can control the course of the moon and sun within his small realm. Cyclops slavers were using it as a base, but the Sky Shaper was pleased when the firbolgs recently arrived and killed the cyclopses in a glorious battle.

These firbolg hunters, working to gain favors from the eladrin of the Frostwhite Forest, have staked out this grove. The eladrin have detected the path of the *Seed of Winter* and helped set up the firbolg ambush. The firbolgs want to capture the PCs. The first group doesn't speak. They fight for the sake of fighting, wishing to test the PCs' mettle. In the second battle, if the firbolgs find out the PCs are willing to meet with the eladrin peacefully, they volunteer to lead them, but still ask if they can fight until one side submits.

Tactical Encounter: A2. Sky Shaper's Grove (page 22).

Tactical Encounter: A3. Firbolg Cave (page 24).



Pyradan

A dusk harrier named Pyradan leads this small group of firbolgs and their beast allies. He's comfortable in battle, but gruff and tactless when interacting with others. He works for the eladrins only because they have the foresight to find powerful opponents who can give the firbolgs a good fight. He uses the missions they give as training, and he asks only that he be allowed to take trophies of his victory.

Eladrin Encampment

After the battle, the firbolgs lead (or carry, if the PCs lost) the PCs to a battle camp of eladrin ruled by Inzira, Daughter of Frostwhite Forest. The firbolgs depart soon after, tired of the companionship of other humanoids.

In the battle camp, the PCs meet one of Inzira's lesser generals, Druemmeth Goldtemple. He is a tall, muscular eladrin with long, dark brown hair and, true to his name, streaks of gold in the hair above his ears. Adorned in mithral chainmail and wearing a longsword, he's clearly prepared for battle.

Druemmeth questions the PCs. He has heard tales about the war against the githyanki, so he knows the PCs by reputation and is friendly to them as long as they aren't aggressive. In fact, he apologizes for sending the firbolgs after them, claiming that he would have approached them more diplomatically had he known who they were.

However, Druemmeth hasn't received word about the events in Nefelus, and he wants to know how the PCs attained the *Seed of Winter*. If they're forthcoming and appear honest, he believes them easily. Otherwise, his attitude is no longer friendly, and his interrogation grows more threatening. Whether he finds out what he wants to know with little effort or is unable to pry any information from the PCs, he asks the PCs to leave his tent while he converses with Inzira, his ruler. When he brings the PCs back in, he has prepared a means for the PCs to converse with Inzira.

Read the following:

The general says, "Inzira seeks a temporary alliance with the Stone-Skinned King. It's best if she speaks with you." He then removes a mithral medal from his chest and pins it to the wall of the tent. Ice spreads from it, crystallizing across a large surface, and forming the image of a female eladrin's face. With long white hair and piercing, icy blue eyes, her presence is cold and unfeeling. Her eyes study you as she speaks.

"The Seed of Winter belongs to me, not to you and certainly not to the Stone-Skinned King. It was a gift from Koliada to me when I was a mere child, and I have no intention of parting with it. However, I see that the fomorian and I must work together to foil the plots of Sangwyr. Use the Seed of Winter for the time being, as a tool to make a way into the King's court. I'll be expecting you to return it when you're finished.

"It's convenient that our interests align, so you'll be my messengers. Tell the fomorian I do not like him, and I know he does not like me. However, Sangwyr utterly hates both of us, and we must stop his stupid uprising."

Druemmeth offers to guide the PCs to a place near the Stone-Skinned King's palace, where they can easily find some of the king's guards. The general is proper and respectful, though it's clear he resents that the PCs were sent as Inzira's emissaries rather than himself. He also mentions that emissaries were sent before, but haven't been heard from again. He asks that the PCs attempt to find them and have them released—if they're alive.

Sangwyr's Cronies

Before the PCs and Druemmeth can leave the battle camp, raiders affiliated with the upstart fomorian Sangwyr make a bold strike against them. While the other eladrin soldiers fight off lesser members of the horde, a few monsters break through to attack the tents around Druemmeth. After the assault, if Druemmeth still lives, he urges the PCs to make their way to Cachlain's court even sooner.

Tactical Encounter: A4. Battle Camp Raid (page 26).

The Seed of Winter

Over the course of most of this adventure, the PCs still carry the *Seed of Winter* they gained during "Alliance at Nefelus." The *Seed* isn't pleased about being used as a bargaining chip, and it makes its wishes known. When it realizes it has the chance to return to Inzira's possession, it decides that's what it truly wants. The *Seed* is impatient and vocal about its wishes, but Inzira can calm it for the immediate future. The *Seed* proves useful when fighting the inferno bats in "Invasion Tunnel" and the winter wolves in "B4. Caged Animals."

Cachlain's Court

After their first audience with Cachlain and Sovacles, the PCs have some time before Sangwyr attacks. They have a chance to explore a few areas of the court, and meet some old and new allies. Most of the encounters in this section are attacks by Sangwyr's followers, or they occur toward the end of the adventure—when the PCs face Sovacles and Cachlain.

The Court

A vast network of subterranean tunnels, both natural and constructed, the domain of the Stone-Skinned King is labyrinthine. Dozens of exits to the surface dot the landscape, and Cachlain's troops patrol that territory aboveground, which the king considers a part of his domain.

The PCs can approach the guards to be taken to the king, and they reach the area with little trouble. Infiltration is possible, if they can move into one of the exits. However, navigating the winding, twisting tunnels of the Feydark palace is nearly impossible, not to mention dangerous. Some of the tunnels don't even appear to lead back to the central complex, and connecting tunnels can be found only through secret doors. If the PCs decide to enter this way, create a complexity 2 or 3 skill challenge.

When the PCs enter the tunnels, read:

As you descend into the tunnels of Cachlain's domain, the air becomes cold and stagnant. The purple crystal that forms the walls around you glows faintly. Strange, vibrantly colored mosses and fungi carpet the floors and walls, though living quarters and common areas you pass through are scoured clean. Slaves and their cyclops overseers walk the halls, and you begin to see a wider variety of fey as you move closer to the heart of Cachlain's holdings.

The map and descriptions here describe only a small segment of the fomorian's massive underground palace. Numerous passages, living quarters for servants, and workshops used by cyclops artisans sprawl out for miles surrounding the main complex of the court.

Features of the Court

Most of the rooms and halls of Cachlain's court share some common features

Illumination: Bright light. Magic torches line the walls, emitting yellow and blue light.

Doors: In most areas, unlocked double doors are large enough for Huge creatures to fit through, or no doors exist there at all.

Walls: Most walls are hewn from purple crystal and supported in some places with beautifully forged iron plates.

1. Foyer

The only room connecting public passageways and Cachlain's throne room, this room also contains a secret door that leads to a set of stairs connected to a hidden prison (area 6).

Perception Check
When PCs are in this room, compare their passive Perception checks to the DC below.
DC 25: *You catch a faint light shining through the deep purple crystal of the eastern wall of this room. It outlines what is almost certainly a secret door.*

2. Throne Room

This room is where Cachlain spends most of his time, watching the gladiatorial matches through the enormous window in the floor of the room. It's also where he speaks to important visitors.

A warding ritual protects the door between this room and the hallway, and only a command from Cachlain or Sovacles can open the door.

The PCs have a skill challenge here when they first arrive to meet with the king.

Skill Challenge: SC2. Audience with the King (page 28).
The PCs later engage in battle with Cachlain and Sovacles in this room. See the "Confrontation" section.

3. Cachlain's Bedchamber

The fomorian king's sleeping quarters are spacious and ornately decorated, with iron filigree along the walls. It's unlikely the PCs end up in this room, and there's no chance Cachlain invites them there for any reason. Inside the room is an enormous bed with blankets made of luxurious animal hides.

The only interesting information that can be found in this room is in the fomorian king's diary. It has a brief description of each day, with few facts and a lot of paranoid rambling and screeds against the king's rivals. Interestingly, the king hasn't made an entry for several months—not since Sovacles became his new advisor.

4. Banquet Hall

An enormous table fills the center of this room. It's made from an enormous, ancient tree split in half, and a few twigs still grow from it. The table is ringed with chairs, some sized for Large creatures and others for Medium creatures. Cachlain doesn't join in at banquets, instead allowing his closest cyclops followers to entertain his guests.

Encounters in the Court

The middle encounters in Cachlain's court don't occur in any particular order. Once the PCs arrive, they meet with the king, but they'll have some time to kill before they see the king again. They later are called back to the throne room for the "Throne Room Showdown" encounter. Between those bookends, they explore. Use encounters based on where the PCs go or what secrets they try to uncover. If you know PCs intend to go to one place repeatedly, consider triggering the encounter on a later visit. Sangwyr and his githyanki allies (who plan to betray Cachlain) engineered all the attacks, but the assaults don't necessarily occur in sequence or in close proximity. Put whatever amount of time feels best between the fights.

Assassination Attempt (Area 6): The PCs might explore the secret prison after seeing the secret door. Instead, they might hear rumors about Cachlain's former advisor, and receive a hint that she's in a hidden prison.

Disrupted Banquet (Area 4): Bram invites the PCs to the banquet as a token of respect. If they refuse, Cachlain's relative, Droeth might request their attendance (and it's a bad idea to refuse the king's kin).

Invasion Tunnel (Area 5): This battle might occur when the PCs return to rest, or right after the "Disrupted Banquet" or "Caged Animals" encounters. In either case, this invasion raises an alarm that gets the PCs' attention.

Caged Animals (Area 8): The PCs might be in the arena to watch a bout, hear rumors about a plot to cause mischief, or respond to an alarm.

The Ambassadors' Banquet

The PCs are invited to a banquet at one point, where they meet the ambassadors from other courts. Among their number are the following.

Droeth: This laconic cyclops speaks for Uluhcouram, a fomorian monarch and close relative of Cachlain. He doesn't appear to have any pressing business, and he has been in Cachlain's domain for a while, just wasting time. Though he appears to be a lazy, uninteresting toady, he's an oni spiritmaster in disguise. He dispatched Droeth some time ago and plans to take the ambassadors hostage and steal the *Seed of Winter*.

Andrinna Baelsblood: A haughty tiefling, Andrinna claims to be a direct descendant of the rulers of Bael Turath. She runs numerous slave trading operations in the world and has come to propose sharing resources with Cachlain.

Troke: Dissatisfied with his treatment here, this satyr came to resolve a territory dispute with the king, and he hasn't had an audience for nearly a month. He represents the Circle of Crownstone, a collective of fey who live in lands that border Cachlain's domain.

Bram Ironfell: This former ally now represents the githyanki interests in Cachlain's court. The PCs have a chance to talk to him during the banquet. He

Bram Ironfell, Githyanki Ambassador

Since the PCs met him in "The Lost Mines of Karak" (*Dungeon* #159), the dwarf Bram Ironfell has gone from being a secret agent of Sarshan to serving as an ambassador on behalf of the githyanki. When they meet him in Cachlain's palace, the PCs realize that the dwarf has made a power grab among the githyanki forces and has been rewarded for treachery against the people of his homeland.

The more the PCs talk to him, the more they realize that he has some regrets about his decision. He acts harried and fearful. The PCs have a chance to talk with him at length during the banquet.

He is surrounded by githyanki bodyguards at all times. One is Arzoa, who attempts to assassinate the PCs if they venture into the secret prison (see the "Assassination Attempt" encounter).

isn't willing to talk about what he has done to achieve his place in the githyanki hierarchy, nor the ways he betrayed the people of the Elsir Vale (more out of shame than secrecy). However, he doesn't mind talking about the githyanki and what he has learned about them. The following are some of the bits of information the PCs can pry out of him.

- Bram deserted the people of the Elsir Vale because he was certain they were going to lose the war, and it was better to survive by joining the enemy than to die with the others. He's surprised at the PCs' success fighting off the githyanki and their allies.
- Vlaakith, the Lich Queen, who once led the githyanki, has been slain. They're now lead by Emperor Zetch'r'r, who seeks to bring war and conquest across the planes.
- The githyanki are merciless and destructive, and they leave nothing behind in realms they conquer. After sacking the entire land and destroying everything they find, they leave nothing but a barren wasteland.

During the banquet, some of Sangwyr's agents attempt to take hostages. The agents also placed sedatives in the meal, so keep track of which PCs partake in food and drink at the banquet. Refer to "B1. Disrupted Banquet" to run the sleeping elixir.

Tactical Encounter: B1. Disrupted Banquet (page 31).

5. Ambassadors' Quarters

Visitors to the court stay in these modest rooms. Two are meant to house Medium creatures, and the northeast room is larger—fit for a Large or Huge visitor. The doors to the chambers lock and require a DC 20 Thievery check to open.

The middle room is for the PCs, and Cachlain's servants bring cots if there are more than four PCs. It's not particularly comfortable, but the beds are high quality, and the room is quiet.

The room to the west houses Bram Ironfell and his two guards. See the sidebar about Bram Ironfell. He also makes an appearance in the "Disrupted Banquet" encounter.

Sangwyr's agents tunnel into these rooms and begin marauding through the halls.

Tactical Encounter: B2. Invasion Tunnel (page 34).

6. Hidden Prison

Located below the other rooms on this level of the court, this prison is down a flight of stairs concealed behind a secret door. The prison contains three cells, each of which is occupied.

Talyrin: A former advisor to Cachlain, this cyclops is a wealth of information (see below).

Eladrin Ambassadors: In one cell sit two eladrin followers of Inzira named Elletraius (male) and Serennel (female). Sovacles and the king jailed them shortly after they arrived two weeks ago, seeking an audience so they could propose an alliance. Sigils covering the walls, floors, and iron bars prevent them from teleporting out of their cell. They have little new information and are curious as to what has been happening outside. They've been talking with Talyrin from time to time, though they don't trust her any more than she trusts them.

"Legbreaker" Kimdal: This gnome might be the only prisoner who unequivocally deserves to be here. Known only for larceny and violence, this vicious thief awaits his execution. He's gruff and off-putting, and all his practical advice is about various ways to murder fey creatures and which ones have the best loot (arguably useful information for PCs).

Talyrin

This cyclops was once the king's advisor, but was imprisoned once Sovacles took over her spot. She has been in this prison for months and is eager to help anyone who can help release her. Though she's by no means a friend of good or of the eladrin, she's the lesser of two evils compared to Sovacles. Despite her situation, she's still fiercely loyal to Cachlain. If the PCs talk to her, they can learn the following information.

- Sovacles arrived about three months ago and quickly ingratiated himself with Cachlain. Soon after that, Talyrin was imprisoned in the middle of the night. She was imprisoned by Cachlain's order, and no evidence or even accusation is needed for the king to imprison someone. Synch this up with the amount of time that has passed in your campaign. Sovacles arrived at least one month before the PCs encountered the fey in "The Temple Between" (*Dungeon* 161).
- Talyrin believes Sovacles has supernatural power that lets him control Cachlain. This is the first of the Stone-Skinned King's advisors to wield magic openly. Fearing its power, Cachlain was unwilling to choose anyone but sages and powerful warriors as advisors in the past.

- A rival of Cachlain named Sangwyr has long coveted the Stone-Skinned King's caverns. For decades now, the upstart has fought both Cachlain and the eladrin of Frostwhite Forest. Talyrin hears that Sangwyr's forces are growing, bolstered by allies from another plane. (She doesn't know they're githyanki.)
- Under Sovacles's guidance, conditions have gotten worse in Cachlain's realm. The troops moving through secret complexes deep below ground take food and resources that would go to those who live in the court. The cyclopses collect more and more slaves, and Sovacles sends them to assist the githyanki soldiers.
- After the eladrins in another cell told her that Inzira seeks an alliance, Talyrin came to believe it's a good plan—if Sangwyr is truly becoming dangerous. She fears the rumors of his power might be lies spread by the eladrin to trick Cachlain, and she hasn't seen evidence that an attack is imminent.

Tactical Encounter: B3. Assassination Attempt (page 36).

7. Gladiatorial Arena

Within a massive cavern, surrounded by a 10-foot wide chasm, is a vast, flat pillar of bloodstained purple crystal. In this room, gladiatorial battles are held continuously for the pleasure of the fomorian king watching through the window at the apex of the cave. All the walls here are littered with tunnel openings, creating dozens of platforms where audience members can watch the matches. Betting is lively, as are calls for blood. All sorts of humanoids and fey beasts are brought in to battle here, and Cachlain considers this the jewel of his palace.

The climactic encounter of this adventure takes place in this arena. See the "Confrontation" section.

8. Animal Pens

Beasts used for gladiatorial matches are kept here, as are a rack of weapons and some chariots. Cyclops animal handlers, who are also trained guards, guard this area. A tunnel leads from this room to the slave pens and the quarters of free gladiators who fight for fame and wealth.

When Sangwyr's raiders attack, they attempt to set animals free from these pens.

Tactical Encounter: B4. Caged Animals (page 39).

Confrontation

After a string of attacks by Sangwyr's followers, Cachlain invites the PCs back to his chamber to talk about the attacks.

As soon as they arrive, read:

Sovacles commands the doors to the throne room, and they slam closed behind you. The advisor, clearly angered, yells, "The gracious king invited you into his palace, and you use trickery and deceit to compromise the security of his domain. You aid his great enemy, Sangwyr, and you plot against our brave, wise king! At every opportunity, you've allowed them into the king's domain and led them in their assault! Now, submit to imprisonment and the king might spare your lives."

If the PCs try to reason with the king and his advisor, they quickly find that logic won't work, and that Cachlain follows the irrational hatred Sovacles demonstrates for the PCs. Once the PCs become aggressive or anger Sovacles with their persistence, the advisor leads Cachlain in an attack against the PCs.

Tactical Encounter: B5. Throne Room Showdown (page 41).

This encounter leads into the climactic fight of the adventure, as the PCs and Sovacles drop into the gladiatorial arena below and face off.

Tactical Encounter: B6. Arena of Blood (page 43).

Concluding the Adventure

If the PCs knocked Virizan out instead of killing him, Cachlain demands a quick execution, believing the exarch is too dangerous to be allowed to live. He absolutely refuses to let the creature leave his domain. If he has his way, the Stone-Skinned King has Virizan executed, and his remains torn apart by animals from the pens.

If the PCs convince Cachlain to let them interrogate Virizan, they find the exarch is extremely disciplined and obstinate. He would rather die than reveal any of his queen's secrets. However, he also boasts, and the PCs might learn the following about Tiamat's plans:

- No one who opposes Tiamat will be left alive when her plans come to fruition.
- She has three other (living) exarchs. Virizan is cryptic, but the PCs can figure out a few things. Tiamat usually keeps one exarch to represent each of her heads, and the PCs have now defeated both her white and green exarchs. Three more remain, each certainly involved in the war against their world.

Cachlain's Choice

After they revealed his advisor's true motives and protected his palace, the PCs have influence over Cachlain. He comes as close to trusting them as a fomorian can. With his autonomy restored, he releases Talyrin from her prison and reinstates her as his main advisor. She vouches for the PCs, too.

Cachlain agrees that Sangwyr is a true danger. He'll ally with Inzira and her eladrin for now, and even—though it pains him to do so—allows her to take the *Seed of Winter* as a token of this alliance. The *Seed* wants to go back to Inzira (for now), and anyone else who keeps it takes the -1 concordance hit for refusing the *Seed* every day.

The king refuses to help the githyanki again, but doesn't intend to take up arms against them. Sangwyr presents a big enough threat to him that Cachlain will be preoccupied with the upstart's destruction for some time.

However, the king does have information about the githyanki strongholds, since they've been using his portals. He gives the PCs some information on a githyanki outpost in the mountains north of Elsir Vale, including a fairly detailed map on how to reach it.

Inzira and the Frostwhite Eladrin

To settle the specifics of the alliance, Druemmeth Goldtemple is invited to Cachlain's court. He thanks the PCs, and states that Inzira sympathizes with their alliance. If the PCs speak with her, they can persuade her to join the Coalition. She appoints Druemmeth to the council, effective once he finishes dealing with Cachlain.

Back to the Coalition

Their task complete, the PCs can return to Sayre to deliver the news to the Coalition. Cachlain allows them to exit through one of his portals (and they arrive near the portal they first took to reach the Feywild). If they succeeded on either the Audience with the King skill challenge or the Release Cachlain's Mind skill challenge (in the "Throne Room Showdown" encounter), he gives them the sigil sequence so they can use Linked Portal or similar rituals to travel to his court.

SC1: The Coalition's Leader

Encounter Level 15 (6,000 XP)

Setup

After the deaths of two of its members, the Coalition's council lacks a strong leader and needs representatives for the Elsir Vale and Sayre. The PCs can nominate a candidate. Most likely, this would be Amyria. The members of the council make it clear that the PCs will not be accepted onto the council, since they are vital to combat efforts and are needed elsewhere. The candidate is selected by all the members of the council who aren't running for the seat, but the council members also listen to those they represent, so convincing the people of various regions is as important as convincing the council members themselves.

Rival Candidates

Two major players oppose the PCs' candidate. Each time the PCs have a failure in the skill challenge, assign it as a success for one of these candidates, based on who you think would do best at the activity described. Describe how these successes benefit the rivals, to let the PCs know how their adversaries fare and where the PCs need to step up. For example, if the PCs try to speak to the people of Overlook and fail at the Diplomacy check, you might decide that many of them have jobs in Quelenna's trade organization, and give their support (and a success) to her instead.

If the PCs choose to support Eoffram or Quelenna instead of a third candidate, skip the skill challenge or do a simple (complexity 1) challenge. The PCs' support is probably enough to carry the candidate to victory, since the two are otherwise evenly matched.

Eoffram Troyas

A member of the Brindol council, the male half-elf Eoffram Troyas is outspoken and rash, and has become even more so as he hears more news of war. When speaking, he is somber, methodical, and humorless. Debate bores him, and he'd prefer to make quick, unilateral decisions than let issues get bogged down in endless chatter.

If you're playing Scales of War, Eoffram was the NPC who recruited the PCs in "Rescue at Rivenroar."

Represents: Brindol.

Motive: Though he truly seeks to do good, Eoffram believes his ideas are the only ones that matter. He's willing to sacrifice whatever he needs to if it helps end the war. A quick, decisive victory is what he believes he needs to establish his leadership and immortalize his name. Eoffram wasn't chosen to advise the Coalition, and still harbors resentment that he wasn't included.

Platform: Eoffram wants to be aggressive—to take the fight to the enemies of the Coalition. A show of force can, in his opinion, cause the enemy troops to scatter and retreat. He favors a combat crash course for citizens of all the Coalition's communities, along with recruiting mercenaries, followed by a rapid assault against the evil forces.

Quelenna Entromiel

Since the council's inception, Quelenna has occupied a seat. Ruler of the settlement called Dornaithos, she has influence over trade in several lands, and she can easily access raw materials needed for the war effort. Traders in every major settlement know her name.

Factions and Council Members

If the PCs try to sway specific settlements or members of the council to their side, special rules apply. Each faction's effect applies only for one success; after a faction has sided with them, the PCs need to find additional allies.

Brindol: Eoffram Troyas made both friends and enemies on his council. If the PCs recruit this faction, they undermine his base. Eoffram loses one success if he has any.

Overlook: The people of Overlook respect the PCs because of their previous assistance and because Kalad allied with them. PCs receive a +2 bonus to attempts to recruit this faction.

Bejam: If the PCs convinced him to join the council, this deva from Nefelus is eager to support them and gives an automatic success.

Fariex: Fariex enjoys political squabbles and especially clever ripostes. If the PCs have succeeded at any political gambits, they receive a +2 bonus to checks to recruit him.

Caliandra: The elf barbarian queen respects strength of arms. If the PCs succeed at the "Blockade" political gambit, they receive a +2 bonus to checks to recruit her. If they fail at that gambit, they take a -2 penalty instead.

Inogo: If the PCs use Religion to recruit Inogo, they gain a +2 bonus to the skill check.

Odos: The githzerai leader isn't interested in these political games and wants the selection process to be over with. If the PCs are far ahead when they attempt to recruit Odos, they receive a +2 bonus to the checks.

She's an expert at arranging deals, especially when time is tight, and some say she'll even use bribes if it will help her.

Represents: Dornaithos, a major trade city.

Motive: Quelenna want Dornaithos's fortunes to continue, and she thinks running the war council is a way to make herself more prominent and secure better deals for Dornaithos to provide war materiel.

Platform: Two words encapsulate Quelenna's proposal: caution and commerce. Quelenna believes—and makes this belief widely known—that the war won't last long, and that the free cities can weather the storm once the githyanki assault runs out of steam. She encourages a defensive posture and argues that building up the defenses of the cities is best for now and for the future. Of course, Dornaithos is happy to provide the materials and expertise to build these fortifications.

The Coalition's Leader **Level 15**
Skill Challenge XP 6,000

Your actions determine whether your candidate becomes the leader of the Coalition.

The PCs argue for their candidate, try to gather support, rebut the arguments of the other candidates, and train their candidate to be a better leader. Most checks in this challenge take one or more days to resolve, so the challenge takes up a bit of time.

Complexity
5 (requires 12 successes before 3 failures). *Special:* When the PCs gain a failure, assign it as a success to one of the rival candidates (whichever is most likely to benefit from the PCs' failure on that specific task). The PCs lose the challenge only if a single rival gains 3 successes. Consequently, they can have more than 3 total failures.

Primary Skills
Diplomacy, History, Religion, Streetwise.

Other Skills
Bluff, Streetwise.

Victory
The NPC nominated by the PCs is chosen to lead the war council.

Defeat
When a rival achieves three successes (in other words, three of the PCs' failures are assigned to that rival), that rival is chosen as the leader of the war council.

Special
If the PCs have developed especially favorable relations with members of the council, or leaders in regions of the coalition, give them one automatic success (total, not per person/region) to represent the support of those individuals.

Bluff
DC 18 (no successes)
By misrepresenting the number of influential people supporting their candidate, the PCs sow doubt in the competition. The next political gambit (see below) has its DC reduced by 5.

Diplomacy
DC 18 (1 success, no maximum successes)
The PC speaks to common people, convincing them to urge their leaders to support the PCs' candidate.

Diplomacy
DC 23 (1 success, maximum 1 success)
Eoffram Troyas seeks both the Elsir Vale seat and the leadership. If the PCs' candidate seeks only the Sayre seat and leadership, Eoffram fights less ardently since the Elsir Vale seat will likely go to him. A PC attempting this check gains a bonus equal to the number of successes the PCs have.

History DC 18 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)
The PCs use their knowledge of historical warfare to coach their candidate on lessons to be learned from past battles, so the candidate can look more knowledgeable about the art of war.

Insight DC 18 (1 success, maximum 2 successes—one per rival)
The PC watches one of the rival candidates speak and figures out some of that candidate's true motives. This also gives a +2 bonus to all checks during the next event (see below) triggered by that rival.

Religion DC 18 (1 success, maximum 1 success)
By encouraging their candidate to show religious devotion, the PCs gain the backing of many religious leaders in various regions.

Streetwise DC 23 (1 success, maximum 1 success)
The PC finds out that Quelenna Entromiel has been bribing officials to secure their support. Exposing her also removes 1 success from her tally, if she has any.

Streetwise DC 11 (no successes)
By gathering or spreading rumors, the PC find ways to undermine a rival's support base. The next ally who makes a skill check in this challenge gains a +5 bonus.

Political Gambits

The PCs' rivals aren't passive in this challenge. The following political events can happen during the course of the challenge, and give Eoffram and Quelenna opportunities to gain successes for themselves (bringing the PCs closer to defeat). Each gambit can appear after the PCs have a certain number of successes, and an entry mentions in what range it should appear. For example, "The Blockade" can occur when the PCs have 2, 3, or 4 successes, and the PCs choose whether to forgo actions when you announce that event occurs.

The Blockade

Occurs when the PCs have 2–4 successes.

A group of hobgoblins seize a road used by the Elsir Consortium and prevent the flow of goods. Quelenna uses this as evidence that trade is vital to the war, and she intends to make sure resources move through it.

Effect: Any number of PCs can skip their next skill checks to travel out and try to break the blockade. One of the PCs makes a d20 roll, with a +5 bonus for each PC participating. The DC is 17.

Victory: The PCs break the blockade, but gain no successes.

Defeat: Quelenna's mercenaries break the blockade, and she gains one success.

Raid on Brindol

Occurs when the PCs have 4–7 successes.

A stealth raid by hobgoblins against Brindol is easily foiled by the city's guards. Eoffram claims this shows that the evil forces can be defeated easily, but the details of his story don't add up.

Effect: One or two PCs can skip their next action in the skill challenge to instead investigate the evidence of this raid. Each PC makes one DC 23 Perception check and one DC 23 Streetwise check. If one PC is sent, it requires a success on both checks, if two are sent, they must succeed at a total of 3 or more.

Victory: The PCs reveal that the severity of the raid was greatly exaggerated, and there's no evidence that the hobgoblins were even associated with the githyanki.

Defeat: Eoffram's views appear more credible, and he gains 1 success.

Accusation

Occurs when the PCs have 7–9 successes.

Quelenna uses her connections to find out about the PCs' wealth, acquired from their various adventures, and uses this evidence to claim that the PCs have only their own profit in mind. Claiming the PCs are biased, she contends that the PCs want only a pawn who can send them to the lands with the most riches.

Effect: Each PC has to defend his or her motives.

Victory: The PCs convince all present that their efforts are noble and intended for the greater defense of the world. Their backing of Amyria carries even more weight, and one PC gains a +2 bonus on the next skill check made during the skill challenge.

Defeat: If at least one PC fails, Quelenna gains a success. If more than half fail, the PCs also lose one success when someone they had already brought to their side reneges to support Quelenna instead.

Changing Sides

Occurs when the PCs have 8 or more successes.

Once the PCs are close to victory, one of the other candidates might switch sides and come to the aid of the PCs. (You might choose to have a rival switch just after his or her second political gambit fails.)

Effect: If either rival has fewer successes than the other, he or she joins the PCs' cause and says that the PCs' candidate speaks for his or her people. This gives the PCs one success and removes a candidate from contention. The rival gains or retains a seat on the war council in any case.

False Commands

Occurs when the PCs have 9–11 successes.

Desperate to prove his plan's viability, Eoffram sends out false orders to three cities, commanding them to raise civilian armies and strike back at the invaders.

Effect: Up to three PCs can forgo their next skill checks to instead try to prevent the messages from being acted on. Each PC can attempt a DC 18 Endurance check to catch the messenger, or a DC 18 Diplomacy check to convince the leaders of the city to ignore the orders. The PCs fail if they commit fewer than three of their members (adjust the number if you have fewer than three players).

Victory: If all PCs succeeded, they prevent Eoffram's plan from working and likely save some lives.

Defeat: Eoffram denies responsibility for the orders, claiming that the people demand this course of action. He must be given control or the war effort is doomed to failure. He gains one success.

A1: Slay the Slavers

Encounter Level 16 (7,600 XP)

Setup

2 cyclops crushers (C)
2 cyclops slavers (S)
1 stone golem (G)

The PCs go down a narrow set of stairs that leads to a large room where water drains from the ruins above.

When they look into the room, read:

Ahead is a room built with white stone brick. Deep channels built into the floor carry water out, away from the room, and you hear a steady flow of water to the south.

In the room sit four cyclopses, who all appear to be relaxing. Two have giant wooden clubs, and the other two have nets attached to their belts and spears slung across their backs. Near the entrance, a stone golem stands perfectly still.

Surprise
The PCs can try to gain surprise. The PC with the lowest bonus rolls a Stealth check opposed by the slavers' passive Perception checks (26 is the highest). The PCs have surprise if no enemies detect them.

Dungeoneering Check
DC 18: *This room looks newer than the surrounding ruins. Judging from the way water falls into the room, it appears the room was built to drain the swampy water away from the ruins, perhaps so they could be made livable once again. The construction uses dwarven methods, and the room was clearly not constructed by cyclopses or other fey.*

When the PCs see the people imprisoned behind the portcullis, read:
An iron portcullis blocks off a dead-end tunnel. Inside are several humans, dwarves, and other residents of the Elsir Vale. When they see you, they shout at you, begging for help.

2 Cyclops Crushers (C) — **Level 14 Brute**
Large fey humanoid — XP 1,000

Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +16; truesight 6
HP 171; **Bloodied** 85
AC 26; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 25
Speed 8

Spiked Greatclub (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +17 vs. AC; 2d10 + 8 damage.

Evil Eye (minor 1/round; at-will)
Ranged sight; targets a creature the cyclops crusher has hit with a melee attack during this round; the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and all defenses until the end of the encounter or until the crusher uses evil eye against a different target.

Tremor Smash (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
Close blast 2; +17 vs. AC; 2d12 + 8 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Elven
Skills Athletics +18
Str 23 (+13) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 19 (+11)
Con 21 (+12) **Int** 10 (+7) **Cha** 11 (+7)
Equipment scale armor, greatclub

2 Cyclops Slavers (S) — **Level 15 Controller**
Large fey humanoid — XP 1,200 each

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +15; truesight
HP 149; **Bloodied** 74
AC 29; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 25
Speed 7

Spear (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +20 vs. AC; 2d10 + 4 damage.

Shuriken (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 6/12; +20 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage.

Evil Eye (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Sleep**
Ranged sight; the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls against the cyclops slaver until the end of the encounter or until the slaver uses *evil eye* against a different target.

Barbed Net (standard; requires net; recharge ⚀ ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
Close blast 4; +19 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target is restrained and takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends both).

Sleep Powder Flask (standard; encounter) ✦ **Sleep**
Area burst 1 within 10; +19 vs. Fortitude; the target is slowed (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is knocked unconscious instead of slowed (save ends).

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Elven
Skills Stealth +19
Str 20 (+12) **Dex** 24 (+14) **Wis** 17 (+10)
Con 21 (+12) **Int** 11 (+7) **Cha** 10 (+7)
Equipment leather armor, spear, 3 nets, 10 shuriken, 1 sleep powder flask

Stone Golem (G) — **Level 17 Elite Soldier**
Large natural animate (construct) — XP 3,200

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +7; darkvision
HP 336; **Bloodied** 168; see also *death burst*
AC 33; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 24
Immune disease, poison, sleep
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6; can't shift
Action Points 1

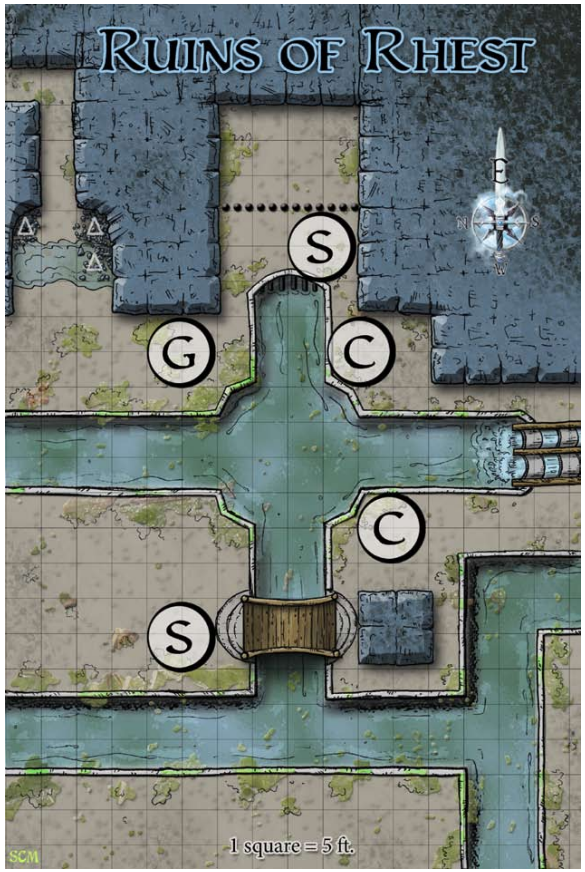
Slam (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +23 vs. AC; 3d6 + 7 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square and dazed (save ends).

Double Attack (standard; at-will)
The stone golem makes two slam attacks.

Golem Rampage (standard; $recharge ⚄ ⚅)
The stone golem moves its speed plus 2 and can move through enemies' spaces, provoking opportunity attacks as normal. When it enters a creature's space (ally or enemy), the golem makes a slam attack against that creature. The creature remains in its space, and the golem must leave the space after it attacks. The golem must end its rampage in an unoccupied space.

Death Burst (when reduced to 0 hit points)
The stone golem explodes in a burst of jagged stones. Close burst 1; +23 vs. AC; 2d6 + 7 damage, and the space it occupied is difficult terrain until cleared.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 24 (+15) **Dex** 7 (+6) **Wis** 8 (+7)
Con 24 (+15) **Int** 3 (+4) **Cha** 3 (+4)



Tactics

The slavers' main goal is preventing the loss of any of the slaves they've just collected. All the cyclopses attack anyone who moves close to the portcullis. This room has a narrow entryway, so it's possible to let the fight stagnate if you create a bottleneck there. Give the PCs a good chance to move into the larger room. Of the enemies, only the golem is likely to move toward the entryway.

Cyclops Crushers: The crushers move into position to guard the slaves' cell, moving into the water if necessary. They use their bulk to block passage and attack with *tremor smash* to keep enemies from going where they want. If they act before the PCs, the crushers move into position, then ready an action to attack anyone who comes into reach.

Cyclops Slavers: The slavers use shuriken and their *evil eye* powers to keep enemies at bay. They move in if multiple enemies are clustered together and toss barbed nets on the foes to entangle them. Each slaver has one flask filled with powder that induces sleep, and they use these expensive items sparingly. They wait until the battle is going poorly before they throw their flasks. The slavers are in command and can order allies to move away from the PCs to make it easier to throw nets over them.

Stone Golem: The golem follows the slavers' orders and tries to keep the PCs away from the slavers and the prisoners. It flanks with one of the crushers. When all the PCs have spread out, or when one of the cyclopses is reduced to 0 hit points, the golem uses *golem rampage* to hurt as many PCs as it can. The slavers direct the golem to use its slam attack to knock PCs into the water. Remember that the stone golem's slam attack can't push a creature if it's used during *golem rampage*.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Several braziers throughout the room provide bright light.

Rubble: The rubble near the entrance is difficult terrain.

Water: The water in constructed channels is 5 feet deep, so PCs need to swim, (DC 10 Athletics). The monsters are tall enough that they can walk through the water in the channels, but they treat it as difficult terrain. The pool near the entrance is shallow, but it counts as difficult terrain.

Portcullis: Prisoners from the Elsir Vale are trapped in a small room behind a well-crafted portcullis. It requires a DC 28 Strength check to force open, and it has AC 4, Reflex 4, Fortitude 12; hp 120. One of the cyclops slavers (of your choice) carries the key.

Walls: The walls are smooth stone, requiring a DC 20 Athletics check to climb.

Treasure: The PCs receive a map and a ritual scroll that let them locate and access a portal near the ruins.

A2: Sky Shaper's Grove

Encounter Level 17 (9,800 XP)

Setup

2 firbolg ghostravens (G)
2 shadow snakes (S)

As the PCs appear in this grove after traveling through the portal from the Elsir Vale, read:

You are surrounded by a circle of tall, columnar stones. A ring of glowing runes encircles them, and then it dims after you arrive. You're in a verdant grove in the Feywild, and a vibrant moon hangs in the sky above the tops of the tall, ancient trees. A bit to the west is a steep cliff. A cave mouth is directly across from you, and two enormous doors made of entwined wood and vines span the tunnel, which is just inside the cave mouth.

The firbolg hunting party wants to surprise the PCs, so roll a Stealth check against the highest passive Perception of the party to determine surprise. Use the lowest bonus among the enemies (the firbolgs' +19). The PCs can't surprise the firbolgs, since the firbolgs know they're coming and the portal doesn't allow for a stealthy entry.

When the PCs see their enemies, read:

You see two humanoids, each about 12 feet tall. They wear headdresses crafted to look like crows and carry enormous picks with the same motifs. Near them, you can barely make out two snakes, each of which has two heads and is made of solid shadow.

2 Firbolg Ghostravens (G) **Level 16 Elite Lurker**
Large fey humanoid XP 2,800 each

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +18; low-light vision
HP 236; **Bloodied** 118
Regeneration 5
AC 30; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 28
Vulnerable necrotic (if the firbolg ghostraven takes necrotic damage, its regeneration does not function on its next turn
Saving Throws +2 (+4 against charm effects, immobilized, restrained, and slowed)
Speed 8
Action Points 1

⊕ **Heavy War Pick** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +21 vs. AC; 1d12 + 7 damage (crit 2d12 + 19).

Double Attack (standard; at-will)
The firbolg ghostraven makes two heavy war pick attacks. If the ghostraven hits two targets with the attacks, one of the targets of the ghostraven's choice is blinded (save ends).

Moonfire (minor 1/round; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃)
Ranged 10; +19 vs. Will; until the end of the firbolg ghostraven's next turn, the target cannot benefit from invisibility or concealment.

Ghostraven Form (minor; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**
Until the firbolg ghostraven attacks, it gains insubstantial and phasing and gains a fly (clumsy) speed equal to its walk speed. While in dim light or darkness, it has concealment while in this form.

Ghostraven Strike
When the firbolg ghostraven hits a target that couldn't see the ghostraven at the start of the ghostraven's turn, the attack deals 2d8 extra damage.

Hunter's Flight
A firbolg ghostraven doesn't provoke opportunity attacks while jumping or when moving at half speed while flying.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Athletics +18, Nature +18, Stealth +19
Str 20 (+13) **Dex** 23 (+14) **Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 17 (+11) **Int** 13 (+9) **Cha** 15 (+10)
Equipment leather armor, raven helmet, heavy war pick

2 Shadow Snakes (S) **Level 16 Skirmisher**
Large shadow beast (reptile) XP 1,400 each

Initiative +17 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
HP 158; **Bloodied** 79
AC 30; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 27
Resist 10 poison
Speed 7, climb 7; see also *shifting shadowstrike*

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Reach 2; +21 vs. AC; 2d6 + 7 damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).

Double Attack (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
The shadow snake makes two bite attacks and shifts 1 square before, between, or after the attacks.

Shifting Shadowstrike (standard; encounter) ✦ **Poison**
The shadow snake shifts 7 squares and makes a bite attack against two different targets at any point during its move.

Vanish into the Night (standard; encounter)
The shadow snake gains the insubstantial and phasing qualities, and is invisible in dim light, until the end of its next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** –
Skills Stealth +20
Str 20 (+13) **Dex** 25 (+15) **Wis** 10 (+8)
Con 22 (+14) **Int** 4 (+5) **Cha** 20 (+13)

Tactics

Between cover from the trees and concealment from the darkness, it can be difficult to find (and hit) enemies in this fight. The hunters take advantage of the terrain and lighting.

Firbolg Ghostravens: The firbolgs are silent throughout this encounter, never letting out more than a grunt of pain. They test the PCs by making a few bad moves, such as provoking opportunity attacks when they don't need to, to see if the PCs are worthy opponents. An Insight check (DC 20) reveals that they are testing the PCs and not fighting as aggressively as they could. If a firbolg is killed, the other retreats when it is low on hit points, rather than facing an unnecessary death.

By using *ghostraven strike*, the firbolgs use the darkness to the fullest. Though it can attack, then

Sway the Sky Shaper **Level 16**
Skill Challenge XP 1,400

A rumbling voice thunders through the sky. "You fight in my domain, do you? Fine, then. Entertain me." You quickly realize this must be the Sky Shaper, the archfey Caliandra told you about.

The PCs can try to sway the Sky Shaper to their side, causing him to make his domain sunny to disadvantage the firbolgs. As the PCs gain successes, the sky gets lighter, and it darkens again if they fail. Each PC can contribute once per round. Most attempts require a minor action, but a character who makes an Acrobatics check for a different reason can count that check for the challenge, and Arcana, History, and Insight checks are all free actions.

Complexity
1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills
Acrobatics, Bluff, Nature.

Other Skills
Arcana, History, Insight.

Victory
The Sky Shaper decides to side with the PCs and alters the sky in this domain: The area is filled with bright light, and each enemy takes 5 necrotic damage at the start of each of its turns.

Defeat
The Sky Shaper supports the firbolgs and alters the sky in this domain: The area remains in dim light, and all light sources that normally create bright light produce dim light instead. In addition, until only one enemy remains, a random enemy becomes invisible at the start of each round of combat, and remains so until the start of the next round.

Inaction
If a round passes without any PC attempting a check on the skill challenge, the PCs gain 1 failure. Tell the players about this effect when the encounter begins.

Critical Hit (1 success, no maximum successes) A successful critical hit gives 1 success (if a PC scored the crit) or 1 failure (if an enemy scored the crit).
Whenever a creature scores a critical hit, the Sky Shaper chortles with glee and rewards that creature.

Fey Pacts (1 success, maximum 1 success per character) Only a creature of the fey origin (such as a gnome or eladrin) or a fey pact warlock can take this action.
The PC invokes a pact the Sky Shaper made with fey races in times past.

Acrobatics
DC 13 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)
The Sky Shaper is easily amused by acrobatic antics.

Arcana
DC 20 (no successes)
The PC searches his or her memory for details about the Sky Shaper and reveals something about the archfey's behavior. Reveal the Sky Shaper's love for acrobatics and compliments.

Bluff
DC 13 (1 success, no maximum successes)
By flattering the Sky Shaper with compliments, the PC gains his favor.

History
DC 20 (no successes)
The PC remembers that the Sky Shaper made pacts with fey. Reveal the conditions of the "Fey Pacts" entry.

Insight
DC 13 (no successes)
Figuring out the Sky Shaper's tastes, the PC learns one type of action the Sky Shaper is fond of. Reveal one of the primary skills for this skill challenge.

Nature
DC 20 (1 success, no maximum successes)
The PC recognizes how the Sky Shaper has reshaped the terrain here and displays this knowledge, impressing the archfey.

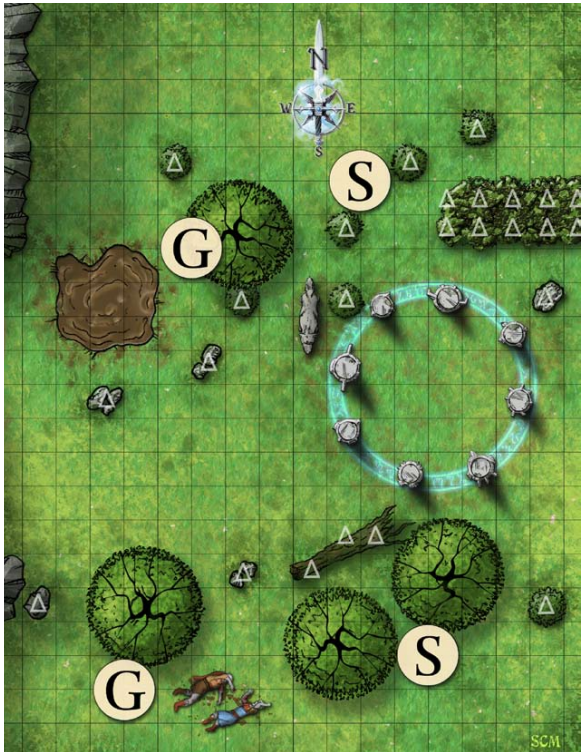
immediately use *ghostraven strike*, it leaves a window to see if the PCs capitalize on the poor tactical decision.

The firbolgs fight to subdue, not to kill. A PC knocked unconscious by a firbolg doesn't make death saving throws.

Shadow Snakes: Unlike the firbolgs, snakes fight on bestial instinct and do attempt to kill PCs. Using trees and standing stones to gain cover, the snakes attempt to hide as often as they can. They are extremely aggressive, unless the Sky Shaper transforms the environment to daylight, in which case they fight while retreating into the trees away from the center of the grove.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Begins in dim light. See the "Sway the Sky Shaper" skill challenge.



Trees: The small (1 square) trees provide cover to anyone who stands in their spaces. The larger trees (3 squares across) have a wider trunk, which is blocking terrain. The rest of these trees provide cover.

Doors: The doors aren't locked and can be opened easily. If this happens, combine the next encounter, "A3. Firbolg Cave" with this one.

Thorn Bushes: The thorn bushes are difficult terrain, and any creature moving into them or starting its turn in them takes 5 damage.

Statue: This stone statue represents a wolflike hound. A creature standing in the statue's space gains cover.

Difficult terrain: The puddle, clusters of rocks, and fallen tree are difficult terrain.

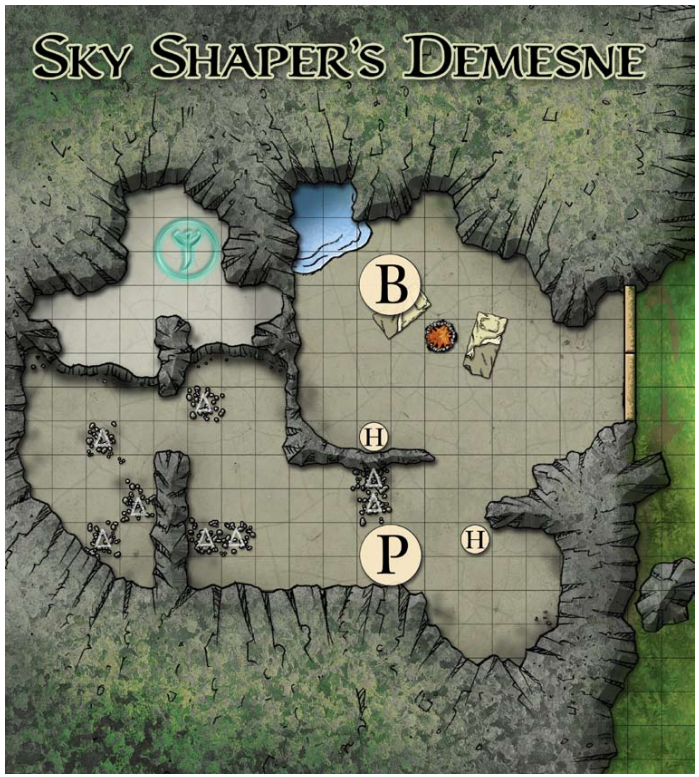
A3: Firbolg Cave

Encounter Level 17 (8,400 XP)

Setup

1 firbolg bloodbear (B)
2 portal hounds (H)
Pyradan, firbolg dusk harrier (P)

This encounter is connected to "A2. Sky Shaper's Grove," and it might even be combined with that encounter if the PCs go through the door into the cave before the previous battle is over.



When a PC enters the cave, read:

Inside this cave you see a blazing campfire surrounded by bedding. In the back of the cave, you can see a constructed wall made of large, natural stones.

When a PC sees the cliff in the back of the cave, read:

A 10-foot-tall cliff rises up in front of you, with a shaft of solid stone separating it into two sections. Atop the cliff, you see that a soft blue light shining from the floor illuminates the ceiling and walls above it.

When Pyradan joins the fight, read:

A firbolg carrying two spears, one of which has a hooked point, faces you. For the first time since you first encountered these firbolgs, one speaks. He says, "It appears you are worthy to fight. And now that we know you're a challenge, it will bring us great glory when we capture you for the Daughter of Frostwhite Forest. Introduce yourselves so we might fight as warriors. I am Pyradan, and the fury of the Wild Hunt runs through my veins."

Arcana Check
A character who sees the magic circle on top of the cliff, or sees another creature using the circle, can make this check.
DC 18: *This magic circle grants clairvoyance, allowing anyone inside it to see nearby areas despite any obstacles in the way.*

Tactics

The firbolgs and their trained hounds attempt to subdue the PCs. If one of the creatures reduces a PC to 0 hit points or fewer, it knocks the PC unconscious, and the PC doesn't make death saving throws.

Portal Hounds: These animals are well-trained hunting companions, and they take orders from Pyradan. Their main purpose is to drag creatures that remain outside the cave into the cave using their teleportation powers.

Firbolg Bloodbear: With its huge damage output, the bloodbear is in charge of beating enemies to a pulp until they've been subdued. It singles out one target at a time, and it especially likes to attack defenders. Facing the bloodbear when it's in its bear berserker form can be dangerous, and there's a chance it will try to kill its opponents while it's berserk.

Pyradan: Preferring to fight in melee alongside allies, Pyradan keeps his enemies contained by sliding them with his hooked spear, trapping them in flanked positions. He taunts his enemies, but respects them if they fight bravely and competently.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light in most areas, but the biggest room is lit with bright light from a campfire.

Campfire: Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the campfire takes 2d8 fire damage.

Water: Fresh water wells up in this cave from a spring. The water is difficult terrain.

Rocks: Piles of rock are difficult terrain.

Cliff: The cliff that leads up to the magic circle is 10 feet tall (2 squares) and requires a DC 15 Athletics check to climb.

Firbolg Bloodbear (B) **Level 15 Elite Brute**
Large fey humanoid XP 2,400
Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +18; low-light vision
HP 240; **Bloodied** 120; see also *bloodbear form*
Regeneration 5 (10 while in *bloodbear form*)
AC 27; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 28
Vulnerable necrotic (if the firbolg bloodbear takes necrotic damage, its regeneration does not function on its next turn)
Saving Throws +2 (+4 against charm effects, immobilized, restrained, and slowed)
Speed 8
Action Points 1

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 2d8 + 9 damage.

⊕ **Claw** (standard; usable only while in bloodbear form; at-will)
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 2d12 + 9 damage.

⸸ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will)
The firbolg bloodbear makes two melee basic attacks. If the bloodbear hits with both attacks, it makes a secondary attack against the target. *Secondary Attack:* +17 vs. Fortitude; the target is grabbed.

⸸ **Bloodbear Maul** (standard; recharges when bloodied)
Reach 2; targets a creature grabbed by the firbolg bloodbear; no attack roll; 4d10 + 9 damage, and if the bloodbear is in bloodbear form, it makes a bite attack against the target as a free action.

⸸ **Bite** (standard; usable only while in bloodbear form; at-will)
+18 vs. AC; 3d12 + 9 damage, and if the target is granting combat advantage to the firbolg bloodbear, the target takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends).

Moonfire (minor; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃)
Ranged 10; +15 vs. Will; until the end of the firbolg bloodbear's next turn, the target cannot benefit from invisibility or concealment.

Bloodbear Form (when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Healing, Polymorph**
The firbolg bloodbear takes the form of a humanoid-bear hybrid. It regains all its hit points, gains regeneration 10, and gains bite and claw attacks. When the bloodbear is bloodied a second time, it reverts to its normal form until the end of the encounter.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Athletics +19, Intimidate +13, Nature +18
Str 24 (+14) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 22 (+13)
Con 20 (+12) **Int** 12 (+8) **Cha** 13 (+8)
Equipment hide armor, bear helmet

Pyradan, Firbolg Dusk Harrier (P) **Level 17 Elite Skirmisher**
Large fey humanoid XP 3,200
Initiative +17 **Senses** Perception +17; low-light vision
HP 322; **Bloodied** 161
Regeneration 5
AC 31; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 27
Vulnerable necrotic (if Pyradan takes necrotic damage, his regeneration doesn't function on his next turn)
Saving Throws +2; +4 against charm effects, immobilized, restrained, and slowed
Speed 8
Action Points 1

⊕ **Spear** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +22 vs. AC; 2d10 + 5 damage.

⊛ **Javelin** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 10/20; +22 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.

⸸ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will)
Pyradan makes two spear attacks, and slides one hit target 1 square. Pyradan then shifts 3 squares.

Moonfire (minor 1/round; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃)
Ranged 10; +20 vs. Will; until the end of Pyradan's next turn, the target cannot benefit from invisibility or concealment, and Pyradan gains combat advantage to the target.

Forest of Spears (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Weapon**
Close burst 2; targets enemies; +22 vs. AC; 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target is either slowed or takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends both). On a critical hit, the target takes both effects.

Deadly Flanker
When an ally flanks with Pyradan, that ally deals 1d8 extra damage with attacks against the flanked creature.

Harrier's Flank (immediate reaction, when an ally moves adjacent to a creature within 2 squares of Pyradan; at-will)
Pyradan shifts 2 squares. He must end this shift in a flanking position with the ally who triggered this power.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Acrobatics +19, Athletics +20, Intimidate +15, Nature +17
Str 22 (+14) **Dex** 25 (+15) **Wis** 18 (+12)
Con 17 (+11) **Int** 13 (+9) **Cha** 15 (+10)
Equipment hide armor, 2 spears, 4 javelins

2 Portal Hounds (H) **Level 16 Controller**
Medium fey beast XP 1,400 each
Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +21; low-light vision
Portal Aura (**Teleportation**) aura 2; when an enemy starts its turn within the aura, the portal hound can teleport that creature to a different square within the aura.
HP 150; **Bloodied** 75
AC 30; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 28
Speed 7, teleport 7

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+21 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage.

⸸ **Dimensional Jaws** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
+21 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the portal hound makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +22 vs. Will; the target is teleported 10 squares.

Portal Walk (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The portal hound attacks, then teleports itself to a square within 10 of it; close burst 1; +21 vs. Will; the target is teleported into a square adjacent to the portal hound, after the hound teleports.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 16 (+11) **Dex** 24 (+15) **Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 14 (+10) **Int** 5 (+5) **Cha** 19 (+12)

Magic Circle: A creature inside the circle can see the domain around the firbolgs. That creature has line of sight to all other squares in the cave and outside as far as the hound statue (see "A2. Sky Shaper's Grove" above). This does not give line of effect, but it does allow the creature to ignore concealment, and to see any creatures, including hidden creatures, in the area.

Doors: The doors aren't locked and can be opened easily. Most likely, they're already open when this encounter begins.

A4: Battle Camp Raid

Encounter Level 15 (6,600 XP)

Setup

2 night hags (H)
3 rakshasa archers (R)
1 troll vinespeaker (T)

While the PCs are finalizing their agreement with Druemmeth Goldtemple, the sound of clashing blades and shouts of alarm echo from a distant part of the camp. All the monsters are attempting to hide, so make Stealth checks for each group. The monsters, NPCs, and PCs roll initiative.

When a PC looks outside, read:

Though the sounds of battle come from far across the camp, you see a few eladrin bodies much closer. The bodies are peppered with arrows or flayed with hundreds of tiny cuts.

If a PC's passive Perception check beat a monster's Stealth check, point out the location where the PC sees movement in the trees.

When a PC sees the troll vinespeaker, read:

You see a troll with thorny vines wrapped around its arms and chest. It chants as it lashes out with magical rays formed of razor-sharp brambles.

Silhouetted Targets

At the start of the fight, a glowing silver sigil illuminates Druemmeth's tent, casting silhouettes. This allows the rakshasa archers outside to shoot at the PCs and NPCs through the tent (which does provide cover). With his first minor action, Druemmeth dims the sigil, ending this effect.

3 Rakshasa Archers (R) — **Level 15 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 1,200 each

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +16; low-light vision
HP 110; **Bloodied** 55
AC 28; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 25
Speed 6

Claw (standard; at-will)
+19 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage.

Longbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 20/40; +20 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 damage.

Double Attack (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The rakshasa archer makes two longbow attacks against a single target or against two targets within 3 squares of one another.

Ghost Arrow (standard; $recharge ⚄⚅) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
Requires longbow; ranged 20/40; +20 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target cannot spend healing surges (save ends).

Deceptive Veil (minor; at-will) ✦ **Illusion**
The rakshasa archer can disguise itself to appear as any Medium humanoid. A successful Insight check (opposed by the rakshasa's Bluff check) pierces the disguise.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Bluff +14, Intimidate +14
Str 17 (+10) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 18 (+11)
Con 14 (+9) **Int** 12 (+8) **Cha** 14 (+9)
Equipment longbow, quiver of 30 arrows

Tactics

The monsters start off by going after Druemmeth, but focus on the PCs once they become more dangerous. They also attack anyone who gets in their way, so the eladrin winter blades and PCs can soak up some attacks to keep Druemmeth from dropping. The hags and rakshasas are in their natural forms.

Troll Vinespeaker: The troll is the leader of this band. It waits until multiple allies are bloodied before using *chant of power.*

2 Night Hags (H) — **Level 14 Lurker**
Medium fey humanoid — XP 1,000 each

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +10; darkvision
Shroud of Night aura 5; bright light within the aura is reduced to dim light, and dim light becomes darkness.
HP 109; **Bloodied** 54
AC 27; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 26
Speed 8

Claw (standard; at-will)
+19 vs. AC; 1d6 + 6 damage. If the night hag has combat advantage against the target, the target is also stunned (save ends).

Dream Haunting (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
The night hag moves into a stunned or unconscious creature's space and makes an attack against it; +18 vs. Will; 3d6 + 4 psychic damage, and the night hag disappears into the target's mind. While in this state, the night hag is removed from play and does nothing on subsequent turns except deal 3d6 + 4 psychic damage to the target (no attack roll required). As long as the target remains stunned or unconscious, the night hag can't be attacked. When the target is no longer stunned or unconscious, or when the target dies, the hag reappears adjacent to the target and is insubstantial until the start of its next turn.

Wave of Sleep (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Psychic, Sleep**
Close blast 5; +17 vs. Will; 1d8 + 3 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target falls unconscious (no save).

Change Shape (minor; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**
A night hag can alter its physical form to appear as an old crone of any Medium humanoid race (see Change Shape, *Monster Manual,* page 280).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +14, Bluff +16, Intimidate +16, Stealth +16
Str 22 (+13) **Dex** 18 (+11) **Wis** 17 (+10)
Con 19 (+11) **Int** 14 (+9) **Cha** 18 (+11)

Night Hags: The hags try to drop Druemmeth, and they take turns using claw attacks and *wave of sleep.* They intend to set up Druemmeth for *dream haunting.*

Rakshasa Archers: After each attack, the rakshasas try to hide if they can. They spread out their attacks, and save *ghost arrow* attacks for PCs.

Troll Vinespeaker (T) **Level 14 Controller**
Large natural humanoid XP 1,000

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +13
HP 142; **Bloodied** 71; see also *troll healing*
Regeneration 10
AC 28; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 21
Vulnerable acid or fire (if the troll vinespeaker takes acid or fire damage, its regeneration does not function until the end of its next turn)
Speed 8

Claw (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +19 vs. AC; 2d6 + 7 damage.

Frenzied Strike (free, when the troll vinespeaker's attack bloodies an enemy; at-will)
The vinespeaker makes a claw attack.

Ray of Thorns (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement**
Ranged 10; +18 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 6 damage.

Chant of Power (standard; encounter) ✦ **Healing, Implement**
Close burst 5; targets allies; the target gains 10 temporary hit points and a +4 bonus to damage rolls while it has the temporary hit points.

Thorny Burst (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement, Zone**
Area burst 1 within 10; +18 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). The burst creates a zone of thorns and brambles that lasts until the end of the encounter. The zone is difficult terrain, and each creature that enters the zone or starts its turn there takes 1d8 damage.

Troll Healing ✦ **Healing**
If the troll vinespeaker is reduced to 0 hit points by an attack that does not deal acid or fire damage, it falls prone and remains at 0 hit points until the start of its next turn, when it regains 10 hit points. If an attack deals acid or fire damage to the vinespeaker while it is at 0 hit points, it is destroyed.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Skills Athletics +16, Endurance +15
Str 18 (+11) **Dex** 16 (+10) **Wis** 12 (+8)
Con 22 (+13) **Int** 16 (+10) **Cha** 10 (+7)
Equipment mantle of thorny vines, gnarled staff

Druemmeth Goldtemple **Level 15 Skirmisher (Leader)**
Medium fey humanoid, eladrin XP 1,200

Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +9; low-light vision
Fey Quickness aura 10; an eladrin ally within the aura can use *fey step* as a minor action.
HP 144; **Bloodied** 72
AC 29; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 25
Saving Throws +5 against charm effects
Speed 6

Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+20 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of its next turn.

Nimbus of Battle (immediate reaction, when an ally within 10 damages an enemy; at-will) ✦ **Healing**
The triggering ally regains 1d10 hit points.

Fey Step (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
Druemmeth Goldtemple teleports 5 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Diplomacy +15, History +17, Insight +14
Str 21 (+12) **Dex** 24 (+14) **Wis** 14 (+9)
Con 16 (+10) **Int** 20 (+12) **Cha** 17 (+10)
Equipment chainmail, longsword

2 Eladrin Winter Blades **Level 14 Soldier Minion**
Medium fey humanoid, eladrin XP 250 each

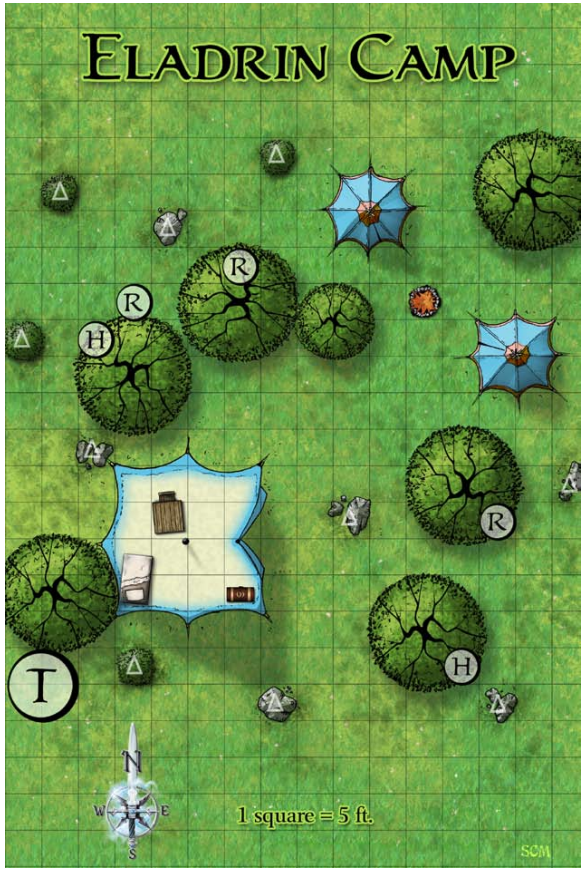
Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion
AC 30; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 24
Saving Throws +5 against charm effects
Speed 6

Winter Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Weapon**
+21 vs. AC; 8 cold damage.

Fey Step (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The eladrin winter blade teleports 5 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Elven
Str 20 (+12) **Dex** 23 (+13) **Wis** 12 (+8)
Con 14 (+9) **Int** 15 (+9) **Cha** 16 (+10)
Equipment leather, longsword

Allies: Druemmeth Goldtemple leads the eladrin soldiers and any eladrin in the party with his aura. He uses the PCs as human shields, preferring to help them rather than venture out into melee and leave himself exposed.



Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light. Squares within 4 of the campfire are bright light.

Rocks: Difficult terrain.

Bushes: A creature in a bush gains cover. Bushes are difficult terrain.

Trees: The tree trunks are blocking terrain. A creature standing in the tree's branches gains cover.

Tents: Walls of tents block line of sight and provide cover (though the large tent has an open entrance).

Audience with the King

Encounter Level 13 (4,200 XP)

Setup

The PCs are taken before the king, in the company of several cyclops bodyguards, when they first arrive. Cachlain is accompanied by his advisor, Sovacles, and they begin to question the PCs about why they've come and how they attained the *Seed of Winter*. Read up on Cachlain and Sovacles before running the adventure, so you can take their personalities and motivations into account during the skill challenge.

When the PCs enter the throne room, read:

A massive throne of purple crystal stands on the far side of this room. Cachlain sits there, looking you over with his grotesque eyes. Like other fomorians, his body is deformed, and his skin purple and covered in warts. Plates of stone are bonded to his flesh. They look almost like armor and are carved with elaborate designs.

Next to the throne is a smaller seat, and when you enter, a human rises from it. He's a slight, bald man, and carries a staff of office. His eyes dart among you as he prepares to speak.

The unique feature of this room is the floor. Giant panes of glass—or maybe smooth crystal—form a window that looks down on an arena far below. Gladiators battle there, and you catch the king sneaking glances at the fight.

Show the players the illustration below.

Arcana or Nature Check
DC 13: *You can tell that the plates in Cachlain's skin are fragments of a stone golem, and they still retain some of the golem's magical essence.*

Cachlain, the Stone-Skinned King

Gruff and easily distracted, Cachlain is a difficult person with whom to converse. He lets his advisor lead the discussion and interjects only when he's annoyed with the proceedings. He rarely asks questions, and when he does they're either insulting or inspired by his deep, unrelenting paranoia.

Cachlain ascended to the throne after he killed his father, and his realm has been steadily growing in size until it stagnated in recent years. He blames this on Sangwyr and Inzira's followers equally. The *Seed of Winter* was one of his most prized possessions, and he lent it to the forces invading Nefelus only under great duress. Sovacles has forced Cachlain to do things he'd

rather not have, and any crack in the advisor's control would let the Stone-Skinned King come to his senses, such as they are.

Though paranoid and cruel, Cachlain is less reprehensible than other fomorian rulers. Cachlain captures slaves to work in his halls or fight in the arena, but isn't as cruel to them as other fomorians. He has even set slaves free in the past, though he stopped that practice after other fomorians saw it as a sign of weakness.

An avid fan of gladiatorial combat, Cachlain spends days in his throne room watching the games; he even takes his meals there and slumbers on his throne. The king keeps strange hours and requires the arena to be active all day and night. The plates in Cachlain's skin were once a stone golem crafted by cyclopses to fight in the arena. It destroyed all who battled it, and when the king tired of seeing the same result in every fight, he had the golem destroyed. Its "reward" was becoming a part of the king. Its consciousness still exists in a latent form, and it feels constant pain from the process that bound it to the king.

Sovacles, Human Advisor

A cold, secretive man, Sovacles speaks for the king. Compromise and compassion aren't in his vocabulary, and he's dismissive of anyone whose goals don't align with his. Though he's arrogant, he's not stupid. He can tell the PCs are dangerous and won't risk confronting them directly the first time he encounters them. Once they've been worn down by Sangwyr's attacks, he thinks he can defeat them.

Appearances are deceiving in Sovacles's case. In truth, he was a snaketongue cultist, given serpentine traits by the yuan-ti. Later, unsatisfied with the power he'd been given, he sought out followers of Tiamat. His ambition paid off, and he received the blessings of the god of greed. He became a shapeshifter, able to take on five different forms. These forms mix human, snake, and dragon traits. In time, his service gained him the title of exarch to Tiamat. He is commonly known by the name Virizan. "Sovacles" is an alias.

The alliance Cachlain made with the githyanki was Sovacles's plan, and the details of it aren't in Cachlain's best interest. In fact, the githyanki are closely allied with Tiamat, and Sovacles serves only her interests. Now, Sovacles thinks Cachlain is too difficult to deal with, and he seeks a more pliable ally. The fomorian Sangwyr seeks Cachlain's throne, and Sovacles forged a secret pact with Sangwyr to depose the king, take over, and embark on aggressive attacks against the enemies of Tiamat and the githyanki.

Running the Challenge

This skill challenge will end in failure as far as the PCs know. Later in the adventure, influencing Cachlain here matters. Keep the number of successes and failures the PCs have accrued a secret—play this challenge close to the vest. Eventually, Sovacles will show the PCs the door. The more success the PCs have, the more suddenly—and angrily—Sovacles sends them away.

Dealing with Cachlain is like talking to an uninterested child, and Sovacles would just as soon be done with the PCs. It's a race against the clock, as the PCs try to make some headway before they're dismissed.

Audience with the King **Level 16**
Skill Challenge XP 4,200

The Stone-Skinned king sits upon his tall throne, looking down on you with disdain. His advisor, Sovacles, steps forward and asks you, "Why do you come here, and what makes you think the great king cares what you have to say?"

Though the PCs are supposed to be here negotiating with the king, it's a certainty that they won't succeed. This is because Sovacles has the king under mental control. The real goals of the challenge are to figure out what Sovacles is doing and to plant the thought in Cachlain's mind that the PCs might be powerful, and that Sangwyr is a true danger.

Complexity
3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures)

Distraction
The gladiatorial battle in the area below distracts the king. At the start of each round of the skill challenge, roll a d6. On a 5 or 6, the king isn't paying attention that round, and the DC for primary skills is increased by 5.

Primary Skills
Acrobatics, Athletics, Bluff, Diplomacy, History, Intimidate.

Other Skills
Arcana, Insight.

Victory
The PCs are asked to leave for now, but they're given a room among the ambassadors' quarters. Sovacles tells them they'll be granted another audience in a few days, after the king has had time to ponder their words.

Defeat
Sovacles says the king has had enough of the PCs' chatter and tells them to leave the court. However, as they leave they see Bram Ironfell, who requests they be allowed to stay for a time so he can talk to them.

Special (1 success, maximum 1 success)
By presenting the *Seed of Winter*, the PCs gain an automatic success.

Acrobatics or Athletics
DC 13 (1 success, maximum 1 success per PC)
By performing a feat of strength or agility, the PC appeals to the fomorian's love of gladiatorial skill. If Cachlain was distracted (see "Distraction" above), restore the DCs to normal for this round of the skill challenge. The king is impressed and takes those he perceives as powerful warriors more seriously.

Arcana
DC 13 (no successes)
The PC discovers that Cachlain is affected by a type of magic that affects the mind.

Arcana or History
DC 20 (1 success, maximum 1 success per skill)
By reciting some of the history or magical traits of the Seed of Winter, *the PC inflames Cachlain's hunger to possess the item, and makes him more eager to make a deal with them.*

Bluff
DC 20 (1 success, maximum 3 successes)
The PC worries Cachlain by lying about how much danger the king is in, or suggesting that his githyanki allies or advisor are treacherous. Bluffing successfully requires making the king feel he's in danger, not just describing the actual state of things.

Diplomacy
DC 25 (1 success, maximum 3 successes)
Attempting to sway Cachlain to help the Coalition and/or Inzira, the PC overcomes the king's mental block—to at least a small degree—and makes him see reason.

Insight
DC 13 (no successes)
The PC tells by Cachlain's behavior that he doesn't have his wits about him, or sees that when Sovacles makes a suggestion Cachlain is quick to adopt the same line of thinking.

Intimidate
DC 20 (1 success, maximum 3 successes)
Sovacles claims that threats won't work against the mighty king, but Cachlain himself is clearly shaken. His paranoia makes him more susceptible to intimidation.

B1: Disrupted Banquet

Encounter Level 14 (5,600 XP)
Encounter Level 15 (6,300 XP) if Bram Ironfell joins the oni and rakshasas

Setup

Andrinna Baelsblood (A)
Bram Ironfell (B)
1 oni spiritmaster (O)
3 rakshasa warriors (R)
Troke (T)

At the start of this encounter, the rakshasas and oni are still disguised and are posing as dinner guests. The oni is in the form of Droeth, the fomorian. The three rakshasas have replaced the githyanki in Bram Ironfell's entourage.

The agents have also tainted the food at the banquet with a solution that causes sleep. Compare the DC below to the PCs' passive Perception checks.

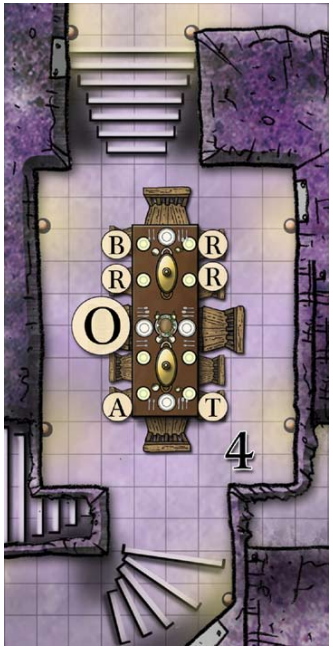
Perception Check
DC 25: *You detect an odd, sweet scent in the food and wine.*

A PC who succeeds on the Perception check (or is told about the strange scent) can make a Nature or Thievery check.
DC 20: *On closer inspection, you can tell the scent is typical of alchemical elixirs that cause sleep.*

The elixir works slowly, so give the PCs time to interact with the other guests (especially Bram Ironfell) before anyone falls asleep.

When the elixir takes effect, make an attack against Bram Ironfell and any PC who ingested the food or drink. The other NPCs (Andrinna Baelsblood and Troke) eat or drink (assuming the PCs didn't warn them against doing so), and are automatically hit. The attack is +22 vs. Fortitude, and any creature hit is unconscious until awoken by being attacked or shaken awake (a standard action). After being woken up, the creature is slowed (save ends).

If anyone is still conscious after the elixir takes effect, the monsters transform to their true forms and attack whoever's left. Otherwise, they abscond with the bodies, take them to the ambassadors' quarters, and restrain them with manacles. In that case, the battle occurs in that area instead (once the PCs escape).



Tactics

The monsters have two goals: to eliminate witnesses by killing anyone still conscious, and to kidnap the ambassadors to hold for ransom. The oni, disguised as Droeth, secured the largest of the ambassadors' suites, and they plan to take the hostages there to transport them out of Cachlain's palace. (See "B2. Invasion Tunnel" to see how they plan to transport them out.)

Oni Spiritmaster: As soon as it acts, the oni moves out into the closest hallway (using *spirit form* if it needs to move without taking too much damage from opportunity attacks). It then brings out its howling spirits, making them into a line to block the hallway off. It counts on the rakshasas to mark enemies, and it relies on all its allies to keep it safe so it can use ranged attacks from a safe position. The oni uses *devour spirit* when it's cornered and needs to use *spirit form* or *howling blast* again.

Rakshasa Warriors: The rakshasas try to block off the exits, and they mark PCs to try to prevent them from attacking the oni or howling spirits. When a rakshasa isn't in a dangerous position, it grabs one of the unconscious ambassadors and drags him or her toward the hall to the north.

Bram Ironfell (B) **Level 12 Skirmisher (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, dwarf XP 700

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +10; low-light vision
HP 123; **Bloodied** 61
AC 26; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 26
Saving Throws +5 against poison effects
Speed 5

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+17 vs. AC; 2d4 + 5 damage.

Coward's Slice (standard; at-will)
Bram makes a dagger attack, then shifts half his speed. If the attack hits, the target is marked by one of Bram's allies within 5 squares of the target. The mark lasts until the end of Bram's next turn.

Ambassador's Sanction (standard; at-will)
Close burst 10; targets one ally in burst; the target can move half its speed and make a melee basic attack. The target receives a +2 bonus to the attack roll if it attacks a creature marked by the target.

Stand Your Ground
When an effect forces Bram Ironfell to move—through a pull, a push, or a slide—he moves 1 square less than the effect specifies. When an attack would knock Bram prone, he can roll a saving throw to avoid falling prone.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven, Elven
Skills Bluff +17, Diplomacy +17, Dungeoneering +15, History +14
Str 14 (+8) **Dex** 12 (+7) **Wis** 18 (+10)
Con 19 (+10) **Int** 16 (+9) **Cha** 22 (+12)
Equipment dagger

Oni Spiritmaster (O) **Level 14 Elite Artillery**
Large natural humanoid XP 2,000

Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +14; darkvision
HP 142; **Bloodied** 71
AC 26; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 26
Saving Throw +2
Speed 7; **fly** 8 (clumsy); see also *spirit form*
Action Points 1

Claw (standard; at-will)
+21 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 damage.

Dread Fear (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fear, Necrotic**
Ranged 20; +19 vs. Will; 3d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls against the oni spiritmaster and undead creatures (save ends).

Harassing Spirits (standard; encounter; see also *devour spirit*) ✦ **Necrotic, Psychic**
Ranged 20; +19 vs. Reflex; 3d10 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target is dazed and takes ongoing 10 psychic damage (save ends both).

Howling Blast (standard; encounter; see also devour spirit) ✦ **Fear, Psychic**
Close blast 5; targets enemies; +17 vs. Will; 2d8 + 6 psychic damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Deceptive Veil (minor; at-will) ✦ **Illusion**
An oni spiritmaster can appear as a Medium or Large humanoid. A successful insight check (opposed by the oni's Bluff check) pierces the illusion (see "Change Shape," *MM* 280).

Devour Spirit (minor 1/round; at-will)
The oni spirit master devours one howling spirit within sight, killing it and recharging *harassing spirits*, *howling blast*, or *spirit form*.

Spirit Form (standard; sustain standard; encounter; see also devour spirit) ✦ **Polymorph**
The oni spiritmaster becomes insubstantial, gains phasing, and gains fly (hover) 8 until the end of its next turn.

Spirit Retinue
An oni spiritmaster starts combat with four howling spirits. These four spirits are part of the oni spiritmaster's XP value. An oni spiritmaster can have twelve howling spirits as part of its retinue, with each howling spirit beyond the first four counting toward the encounter's XP value.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Skills Bluff +17, Religion +14, Insight +14
Str 18 (+11) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 14 (+9)
Con 22 (+13) **Int** 19 (+11) **Cha** 21 (+12)

Howling Spirit **Level 14 Minion**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead), oni XP 250 each*

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +14; darkvision
Choir of Madness aura 1; any enemy within the aura that takes damage from a power that has the fear or psychic keyword takes 5 extra psychic damage.
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic, insubstantial
AC 30; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 28
Speed fl y 8 (hover); phasing; see also *spectral strafe*

Spectral Strafe (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
The howling spirit shifts 1 square before or after the attack; +17 vs. Reflex; 7 necrotic damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Str 6 (+5) **Dex** 24 (+14) **Wis** 14 (+9)
Con 12 (+8) **Int** 6 (+5) **Cha** 21 (+12)
*** XP is included in the oni spiritmaster's XP value.**

3 Rakshasa Warriors (R) **Level 15 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid XP 1,200 each

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +16; low-light vision
HP 142; **Bloodied** 71
AC 31; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 28
Speed 6

Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The rakshasa warrior makes two attack rolls and keeps the better result; +21 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the rakshasa's next turn.

Claw (standard; at-will)
+21 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.

Tiger Pounce (immediate reaction, when a marked enemy within 5 squares of the rakshasa warrior shifts; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The rakshasa shifts to the nearest square adjacent to the enemy and makes a basic attack against it.

Deceptive Veil (minor; at-will) ✦ **Illusion**
The rakshasa warrior can disguise itself to appear as any Medium humanoid. A successful Insight check (opposed by the rakshasa's Bluff check) pierces the disguise.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Athletics +15, Bluff +14, Intimidate +14
Str 20 (+12) **Dex** 18 (+11) **Wis** 18 (+11)
Con 14 (+9) **Int** 12 (+8) **Cha** 14 (+9)
Equipment scale armor, heavy shield, longsword

Bram's Fate

After the fight, the PCs need to decide what happens to Bram (if they didn't already kill him). The githyanki are finished with his services, the Coalition won't welcome him back, and Cachlain doesn't want him around if he's not a useful diplomat. If he's set loose on his own, the githyanki probably kill him, and if he's taken back to the world, the Coalition might execute him for treason. The future's not bright for Bram Ironfell.

Development

Bram's moment of truth comes during this encounter, as he decides to continue fighting for his githyanki masters or to assist the PCs. Bram didn't know his guards were rakshasas in disguise, so he's taken aback by their actions. Bram chooses sides based on how friendly and persuasive the PCs were when speaking to him. He wants to side with the winners, and he's not above cowering indecisively for a round or two until he can guess the victor, or trying to switch sides in the middle of the fight.

The monsters' githyanki masters don't plan to keep Bram around, so the oni and rakshasas don't bother protecting him even if he joins their side.

Features of the Area

Illumination: One magical sconce fills the prison with dim light. The hallway to the west is dark.

Cells: The prisoners' cells are locked. Opening the lock requires a DC 30 Thievery check. The bars can be bent or destroyed (break DC 28; AC 4, Fortitude 12, hp 120).

Doors: The double doors leading into the prison are open at the start of the battle, though a monster or PC might close them to limit the battle's area. The doors can't be locked.

B2: Invasion Tunnel

Encounter Level 16 (7,050 XP)

Setup

1 drider fanglord (D)
1 scarred bulette (B)
2 inferno bats (S)
5 drow underlings (U)

A bulette, warped by Sangwyr's torturers, digs a path into Cachlain's palace. Drow underlings follow the creature, carefully reinforcing the tunnels it creates while burrowing to allow them to travel through it. A drider fanglord leads the group and also brings along two trained inferno bats. These invaders could arrive to take away the hostages collected in the "Disrupted Banquet" encounter or be another isolated attack to cause havoc in the court.

The tactical map assumes the PCs arrive after the creatures have breached the wall. If you want the monsters to arrive and enter the palace while the PCs are there, have the bulette come through the wall first, followed by the other monsters. The noise the bulette makes while burrowing makes a stealthy entrance impossible for the monsters.

When the PCs see the monsters, read:

A rampaging bulette, covered in thousands of scars, thrashes through the hall. Behind it, you see several weak-looking drow carrying short swords and daggers. In the air above these creatures float two bats made entirely of fire.

When the PCs see the drider fanglord, read:

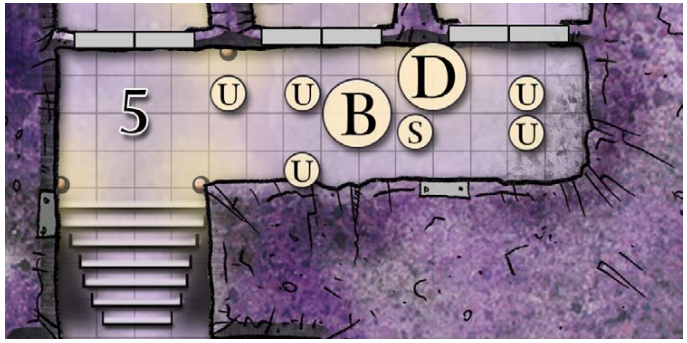
A drider wielding a serrated greatsword moves toward you, climbing along the walls.

Drider Fanglord (D)	**Level 14 Brute**
Large fey humanoid (spider)	XP 1,000
Initiative +12	**Senses** Perception +15; darkvision
HP 172; **Bloodied** 86	
AC 26; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 23	
Speed 8, climb 8 (spider climb)	
(standard; at-will) ✦ **Greatsword** +19 vs. AC; 1d12 + 7 damage.	
Quick Bite (minor; at-will) ✦ **Poison** Requires combat advantage; +16 vs. Fortitude; 1d4 damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).	
Darkfire (minor; encounter) Ranged 10; +16 vs. Reflex; until the end of the drider's next turn, the target grants combat advantage to all attackers, and the target cannot benefi t from invisibility or concealment.	
Web (standard; $recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) Ranged 5; +15 vs. Reflex; the target is restrained. Escaping from the web requires a successful DC 25 Acrobatics check or DC 27 Athletics check.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Elven
Skills Dungeoneering +15, Stealth +17	
Str 24 (+14)	**Dex** 21 (+12) **Wis** 16 (+10)
Con 22 (+13)	**Int** 13 (+8) **Cha** 9 (+6)
Equipment leather armor, greatsword	

Scarred Bulette (B)	**Level 15 Elite Skirmisher**
Large natural beast	XP 2,400
Initiative +14	**Senses** Perception +10; darkvision, tremorsense 20
HP 304; **Bloodied** 152	
AC 29; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 23	
Vulnerable charm (a tortured bulette hit by a charm attack is immobilized until the end of its next turn)	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 6, burrow 6	
Action Points 1	
Bite (standard; at-will) Before it bites, the bulette can make a standing long jump (as a free action) without provoking opportunity attacks; +20 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage, or 4d8 + 6 damage against a prone target.	
Earth Furrow (move; at-will) The scarred bulette moves its burrow speed just below the surface of the ground, avoiding opportunity attacks as it passes underneath other creatures' spaces. As it burrows beneath the space of a Medium or smaller creature on the ground, the bulette makes an attack against the creature; +14 vs. Fortitude; the target is knocked prone.	
Rising Burst (standard; the bulette must have emerged from the ground after burrowing this turn; at-will) Close burst 2; the bulette sprays rocks and dirt into the air when it rises out of the ground; +19 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage.	
Spray of Tainted Blood (when an adjacent creature hits the scarred bulette with a melee attack) The attacker takes a -2 penalty to Fortitude until the end of the scarred bulette's next turn.	
Habituated to Torture While the scarred bulette is bloodied, it gains a +2 bonus to all defenses and to speed.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Skills Athletics +20, Endurance +19	
Str 27 (+15)	**Dex** 21 (+12) **Wis** 16 (+10)
Con 24 (+14)	**Int** 2 (+3) **Cha** 11 (+7)

2 Inferno Bats (S)	Level 15 Skirmisher
Medium elemental beast (fire)	XP 1,200 each
Initiative +17	**Senses** Perception +13
HP 144; **Bloodied** 72	
AC 29; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 23	
Resist 20 fire	
Speed 2 (clumsy), fly 8; see also *fiery swoop*	
(+) **Inferno Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**	
+20 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 5 fire damage, and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends). *Failed Saving Throw:* Each ally of the target, within 2 squares of the target, takes 10 fire damage.	
Fiery Swoop (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**	
The inferno bat shifts 4 squares and can move through occupied squares as it moves. It makes a melee basic attack against any creature whose space it enters. The inferno bat cannot attack a target more than once in this fashion, and it must end its movement in an unoccupied square.	
Heatseeker (immediate reaction, when the inferno bat is damaged by an enemy's ranged attack; at-will)	
The inferno bat shifts 2 squares toward the triggering enemy.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 8 (+6)	**Dex** 27 (+15) **Wis** 12 (+8)
Con 16 (+10)	**Int** 2 (+3) **Cha** 9 (+6)

5 Drow Underlings (U)	Level 14 Minion Skirmisher
Medium fey humanoid	XP 250 each
Initiative +15	**Senses** Perception +9; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 28; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26	
Speed 6	
(+) **Short Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+19 vs. AC; 6 damage.	
(+) **Thrown Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**	
Ranged 5/10; +19 vs. AC; 6 poison damage.	
Darkfire Sacrifice (when the drow underling is reduced to 0 hit points)	
An ally within 5 squares of the drow underling gains combat advantage and ignores concealment on its next attack.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Elven
Str 16 (+10)	**Dex** 23 (+13) **Wis** 14 (+9)
Con 13 (+8)	**Int** 13 (+8) **Cha** 20 (+12)
Equipment leather armor, short sword	



Tactics

Sangwyr's agents attack anyone who approaches, and they fight to the death.

Scarred Bulette: In the relatively confined area of this encounter, the bulette burrows from room to room to move itself out of harm's way or to chase down enemies who are difficult for the bulette's allies to approach. The bulette doesn't worry about its allies, and it doesn't care if it hits them with *earth furrow* or *rising burst*. The bulette can't burrow into the throne room, because it's protected by hundreds of warding rituals put in place by the paranoid fomorian king.

Drider Fanglord: The drider's tactics complement the bulette's. To avoid the bulette's *earth furrow* power, the drider climbs on the walls or ceiling. It uses *web* to set up targets for the bulette's *rising burst* attack, and it uses *quick bite* against creatures that have a penalty to Fortitude from the bulette's *spray of tainted blood*. The drider leads the group and has a rapport with the animalistic inferno bats and bulette.

Inferno Bats: These creatures follow the drider's orders. They use *fiery swoop* to pass over creatures and give them ongoing damage, then flank them with the drider or some of the drow.

Drow Underlings: These poorly trained warriors are fiercely loyal and are willing to give their lives for their commanding drider.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light.

Walls: The hewn crystal walls require a DC 15 Athletics check to climb.

Doors: The smaller rooms' doors are locked, but the doors to the larger room have already been opened by the monsters. A creature inside a room can lock them (with an additional minor action). Locked doors require a DC 18 Thievery check to open.

Furniture: Most of the furniture requires an extra square of movement to move onto. The enormous table in the larger room is high enough for Medium or smaller creatures to stand under. A creature under the table gains cover against Large or larger creatures.

B3: Assassination Attempt

Encounter Level 16 (7,200 XP)
Encounter Level 17 (9,200 XP) with optional skill challenge

Setup

Arzoa, githyanki assassin (A)
2 purplespawn nightmares (P)

As the PCs explore the hidden prison, mysterious assassins attack them. Make Stealth checks for each monster and compare the results to the PCs' passive Perception checks. If the PCs don't detect any of the enemies, the assassins have a surprise round.

If a PC's passive Perception is higher than a monster's Stealth check, read:

You suddenly hear soft footfalls coming from the hall. Whatever's approaching is clearly trying to conceal its presence.

When a PC sees Arzoa, read:

A githyanki clad in heavy, red robes glares determinedly and brandishes two silver longswords. You catch a glimpse of chainmail during her rapid, graceful movements.

When a PC sees a purplespawn nightmare, read:

Skulking through the shadows comes a creature with a vaguely humanoid shape. Purple scales cover its body, and its long tail, tipped with spikes, lashes in the air. It has humanoid arms and carries a longsword.

Arzoa, Githyanki Assassin (A) — **Level 18 Elite Controller**
Medium immortal humanoid — XP 4,000

Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +15
HP 344; **Bloodied** 172
AC 32; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 30
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Silver Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+23 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of its next turn.

Double Attack (standard; at-will)
Arzoa makes a silver longsword or *mind grip* attack, shifts half her speed, then makes another silver longsword or *mind grip* attack.

Mind Grip (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 10; +22 vs. Will; 1d10 + 7 psychic damage, and the target slides 5 squares.

Mind Assassination (minor; $recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +22 vs. Will; 1d10 + 7 psychic damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 psychic damage (save ends).

Tide of Woe (immediate reaction, when an enemy within 10 squares of Arzoa takes psychic damage; usable while bloodied; at-will) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 10; targets the triggering enemy. *Effect:* The target is knocked prone.

Telekinetic Leap (move; encounter)
Ranged 10; targets Arzoa or one ally; the target can fly 5 squares.

Mental Block ✦ **Psychic**
If a creature taking ongoing psychic damage hits Arzoa, that creature takes 2d8 psychic damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Acrobatics +21, Arcana +20, Bluff +18, Stealth +21
Str 17 (+12) **Dex** 25 (+16) **Wis** 22 (+15)
Con 20 (+14) **Int** 23 (+15) **Cha** 18 (+13)
Equipment chainmail, silver longsword

2 Purplespawn Nightmares (P) — **Level 17 Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile) — XP 1,600 each

Initiative +17 **Senses** Perception +8; darkvision
HP 128; **Bloodied** 64
Regeneration 10 (if the purplespawn nightmare takes radiant damage, regeneration does not function until the end of its next turn)
AC 30; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 28; see also *psychic edge*
Resist 10 psychic
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)

Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+22 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 damage.

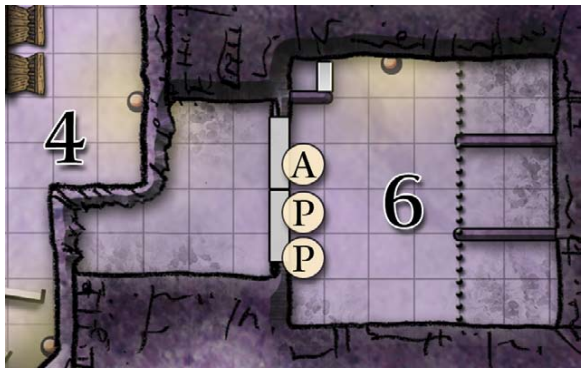
Tail (standard; at-will) ✦ **Sleep**
Reach 2; +22 vs. AC; 3d6 + 8 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is dazed and slowed (save ends both). *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target falls unconscious (save ends).

Nightmare Form (standard; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**
The purplespawn nightmare can alter its physical form to appear as an enemy of its choice. While the nightmare is adjacent to that enemy, roll 1d20 whenever a melee or ranged attack targets the nightmare. On a roll of 10 or higher, the attack instead targets the copied enemy. The copied enemy's attacks are not subject to this effect.

Nightmarish Torment ✦ **Psychic**
If the purplespawn nightmare's melee attack hits an enemy it is copying with nightmare form or a sleeping target, that target takes ongoing 10 psychic damage in addition to the attack's other effect (save ends).

Psychic Edge
A purplespawn nightmare gains a +4 bonus to all defenses against attacks from enemies that are taking ongoing psychic damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Draconic
Skills Acrobatics +18, Bluff +18, Stealth +18, Thievery +18
Str 19 (+12) **Dex** 20 (+13) **Wis** 11 (+8)
Con 20 (+13) **Int** 13 (+9) **Cha** 20 (+13)
Equipment longsword



Tactics

The assassins pile up ongoing psychic damage to increase their effectiveness.

Arzoa: The leader of the assassins, Arzoa is aggressive and smart. She hits the PCs with *mind assassination* as soon as she can to set up her *mental block* and give the nightmares a bonus to all defenses. If she's almost bloodied when *mind assassination* recharges, she saves it so she can use *tide of woe* against PCs when they take damage from it. She tries to keep a PC in melee combat and repeatedly uses double attack to make two longsword attacks against that PC. Arzoa knows that healers are dangerous and tries to beat down leaders quickly.

Purplespawn Nightmares: If the monsters have a surprise round, a nightmare readies *nightmare form* to use against any PC that comes adjacent to it. These creatures are willing to let their leader take the brunt of the attacks. They fight cautiously, aiming to survive until Arzoa becomes bloodied and can use *tide of woe*. Bright light frightens and aggravates the nightmares. If one takes radiant damage, it shifts away from the source.

Talyrin: If the PCs have talked to Talyrin, and she believes they have similar goals, she helps them survive the assassination attempt. She can use a standard action to give a PC resist psychic 5 until the end of that PC's turn. She has also studied purplespawn nightmares and can tell the PCs about their capabilities.

Eladrin Ambassadors: The eladrin can't offer much help. They encourage the PCs and are certain that the assassins must be minions of Sangwyr, but they don't do anything useful.

"Legbreaker" Kimdal: Once the battle starts, this gnome thief rattles his bars and yells that he can help the PCs if they'll just let him out. If they do, he immediately makes a run for the exit. The monsters make opportunity attacks against him if he runs past, but they don't chase him down.

Arzoa's Secrets **Level 18**
Skill Challenge XP 2,000

As you attempt to interrogate Arzoa, you catch a flash of psychic power. She whispers, "You'll get nothing from me. My mind slips away even as I speak. Failure is unacceptable."

The PCs have only a short time to interrogate Arzoa before her mind is gone. If they can act quickly, the PCs have a better chance of getting information from her as she loses her sense of secrecy.

Complexity
1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Mind Degeneration
After every two skill checks the PCs attempt, Arzoa's mental faculties deteriorate, giving the PCs an automatic failure. After the first failure, she's still somewhat lucid. After the second, she has the mind of a child, and with the third she regresses to animal instinct, then dies.

Primary Skills
Diplomacy, Intimidate.

Other Skills
Heal, Insight.

Victory
The PCs learn one piece of information per success. Choose one based on what the PC asked or demanded.

- *"You fight well. Chillreaver . . . perhaps not such a failure."*
- *"Bram is not strong. Not strong like githyanki."*
- *"Cachlain will fall. Too much resistance . . ."*
- *"I follow githyanki ways . . . now the dragons' ways."*

Defeat
The PCs don't find out all the secrets Arzoa knows.

Diplomacy
DC 20 (1 success, no maximum successes)
The PC learns one of the four facts above. Give a PC making a Diplomacy check a -2 penalty per failure the PCs have, as Arzoa becomes more difficult to reason with.

Insight
DC 13 (no successes)
The PC realizes that Diplomacy works best early in the challenge, and Intimidate gets better later on.

Heal
DC 20 (no successes)
By slowing the degradation of Arzoa's mind, the PC buys more time. The PCs don't gain an automatic failure this round. This skill works only once during the challenge.

Intimidate
DC 20 (1 success, no maximum successes)
The PC learns one of the four facts above. Give a PC making an Intimidate check a +2 bonus per failure the PCs have, as Arzoa becomes less stubborn and more pliable.

Development

Arzoa, though she's part of Bram's entourage, acts on behalf of Sangwyr and the githyanki leaders. They've decided to cut Bram out of the loop, since he hasn't been ruthless enough. Though Arzoa knows this, she refuses to divulge any of it. As a part of her training, she mastered a technique to eradicate her own mind in case of failure. If the PCs interrogate her, she uses this ability, and the PCs can enter a skill challenge.

Features of the Area

Illumination: One magical sconce fills the prison with dim light. The hallway to the west is dark.

Cells: The prisoners' cells are locked. Opening the lock requires a DC 30 Thievery check. The bars can be bent or destroyed (break DC 28; AC 4, Fortitude 12; hp 120).

Doors: The double doors leading into the prison are open at the start of the battle. The doors can't be locked.

B4: Caged Animals

Encounter Level 17 (8,600 XP)

Setup

1 chimera (C)
2 quickling zephyrs (Q)
1 thunderfury boar (B)
3 winter wolves (W)

In the animal pens right next to the gladiatorial arena, Sangwyr's quickling minions set the animals loose to run unchecked through the halls of Cachlain's court. The PCs probably arrive from the tunnel on the north side of the room, but there's a chance they'll come through the arena itself.

If you choose, Bram Ironfell and two of his guards might be in their room (the small room with three beds), or Bram might be there alone if his guards were already exposed as rakshasas (in the "Disrupted Banquet" encounter).

When the PCs arrive, read:

Along the walls of this room, well-crafted iron cages stand, filled with various animals trained for gladiatorial combat. Corpses of cyclops animal handlers and guards slump in the corners of the room, their blood splattered across the walls behind them. Two small humanoids with gray skin and powerful legs swiftly move near the cages. They flip open the latches to release the animals.

Roll initiative after you read the text above.

Chimera (C) **Level 15 Elite Brute**
Large natural magical beast XP 2,400
Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +14; all-around vision, darkvision
HP 366; **Bloodied** 183; see also *bloodied breath*
AC 27; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 24
Resist 10 fire
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, fl y 10 (clumsy), overland flight 15
Action Points 1
Lion's Bite (standard; at-will)
+18 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage.
Ram's Charge (standard; at-will)
The chimera makes a charge attack; +19 vs. AC; 1d10 + 11 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square or knocked prone.
Triple Threat (standard; at-will)
The chimera makes the following three melee attacks, each one against a different target:
Lion's Bite +18 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage.
Dragon's Bite +18 vs. AC; 3d6 + 7 damage.
Ram's Gore +18 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage, and the target is knocked prone.
Dragon Breath (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire**
Close blast 5; +16 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 3 damage, and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).
Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied; encounter)
The chimera recharges and uses dragon breath.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Draconic
Str 24 (+14) **Dex** 17 (+10) **Wis** 14 (+9)
Con 23 (+13) **Int** 5 (+4) **Cha** 17 (+10)

2 Quickling Zephyrs (Q) **Level 14 Lurker**
Small fey humanoid XP 1,000 each
Initiative +20 **Senses** Perception +10; low-light vision
HP 82; **Bloodied** 41
AC 30; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 23
Speed 12, climb 6; see also *blinding speed* and *unstoppable*
Short Sword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+19 vs. AC; 1d6 + 9 damage.
Blinding Speed (move; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Illusion**
The quickling zephyr moves 12 squares and becomes invisible until it attacks or until the end of its next turn.
Combat Advantage
If the quickling zephyr has combat advantage against its target, it deals 2d6 extra damage and dazes the target on a successful melee attack (save ends).
Unstoppable
The quickling zephyr ignores difficult terrain and can move across any solid or liquid surface.
Alignment Evil **Languages** Elven
Skills Acrobatics +26, Bluff +13, Stealth +21
Str 12 (+8) **Dex** 28 (+16) **Wis** 17 (+10)
Con 22 (+13) **Int** 16 (+10) **Cha** 12 (+8)
Equipment short sword

Thunderfury Boar (B) **Level 15 Brute**
Large fey beast XP 1,200
Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +8
HP 182; **Bloodied** 91
AC 27; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 20
Speed 8
Gore (standard; at-will)
+18 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, or 3d8 + 7 damage while the thunderfury boar is bloodied.
Death Strike (when reduced to 0 hit points)
The thunderfury boar makes a gore attack.
Thunderfury (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Thunder**
Close burst 2; +17 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 6 thunder damage, and the target is knocked prone. *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is not knocked prone.
Thunderous Charge ✦ **Thunder**
The thunderfury boar deals 10 extra thunder damage when it charges.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 24 (+14) **Dex** 15 (+9) **Wis** 12 (+8)
Con 22 (+13) **Int** 5 (+4) **Cha** 9 (+6)

3 Winter Wolves (W)		Level 14 Skirmisher
Medium natural magical beast		XP 1,000 each
Initiative +14	**Senses** Perception +10; low-light vision	
HP 141; **Bloodied** 70		
AC 28; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 24		
Resist 20 cold		
Speed 8 (ice walk)		
Bite (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold**		
+19 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage plus 1d6 cold damage, or 2d10 + 6 damage plus 1d6 cold damage against a prone target.		
Takedown (standard; usable only when charging; at-will) ✦ **Cold**		
+19 vs. AC; 2d10 + 6 damage plus 1d6 cold damage, and the target is knocked prone.		
Freezing Breath (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Cold**		
Close blast 5; +17 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 6 cold damage. *Miss:* Half damage.		
Drag (minor; usable only while adjacent to a prone enemy; at-will)		
The winter wolf shifts 1 square and pulls a prone target that is adjacent to it 1 square.		
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Giant	
Str 23 (+13)	**Dex** 21 (+12)	**Wis** 17 (+10)
Con 21 (+12)	**Int** 9 (+6)	**Cha** 10 (+7)

Tactics

By the time the PCs and monsters roll initiative, the quicklings have opened two cages. By default, they first open the cages containing the chimera and two of the winter wolves. The first time the zephyrs' initiative comes up, they release the other monsters.

All the animals have been trained for the arena, so they're more tactically savvy than most beasts. However, they don't have a designated target. While most of their attacks target PCs, they sometimes hit the quicklings, especially with multitarget attacks or when the quicklings are bloodied.

Quickling Zephyrs: As often as possible, the quicklings move away from their targets after attacking (using *blinding speed* if possible). They try to keep the animals between themselves and the PCs. Once they're bloodied, the quicklings retreat using the safest path possible.

Winter Wolves: Using pack tactics, the wolves gang up on single foes or small groups. If a winter wolf knocks an enemy prone, it uses *drag* to pull that enemy closer to the other wolves. They also go after creatures knocked prone by the thunderfury boar's *thunderfury*.

Chimera: If multiple enemies are clustered near the pit, the chimera flies across the pit, lands on the other side, and uses *dragon breath* against them. If it doesn't have three PCs in reach for its *triple threat* attack, it uses one of those attacks against a quickling or other humanoid. The PCs might parlay with the chimera, but it has been penned up for a long time, and it's not receptive to reason (and it *definitely* doesn't want to remain in slavery).

Thunderfury Boar: In tight quarters, the boar has some trouble charging. It sometimes chooses to provoke opportunity attacks just so it can charge.

Features of the Area

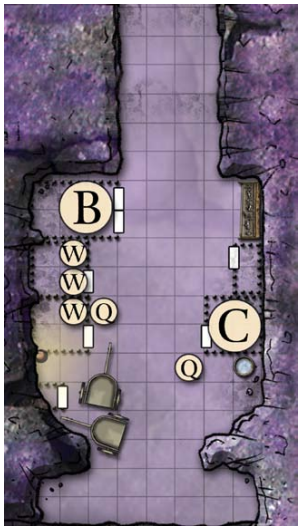
Illumination: Bright light.

Pens: The locks on the pens are easy to open for humanoid creatures. The bars can be bent or destroyed (break DC 28; AC 4, Fortitude 12, hp 120).

Pit: The crevasse that forms the southern border of the room is 4 squares (20 feet) deep. A creature that falls in takes 2d10 damage from the fall. The sides require a DC 20 Athletics check to climb.

Water Basin: It costs 1 extra square of movement to move into the water basin. A Small creature in the basin gains cover. The basin is full of water, but it's not deep enough to do more than make a creature wet.

Treasure: The weapons rack could contain a magic weapon a PC can steal. You can include one of the treasure parcels here (and possibly allow the PC to pick up the weapon during the encounter).



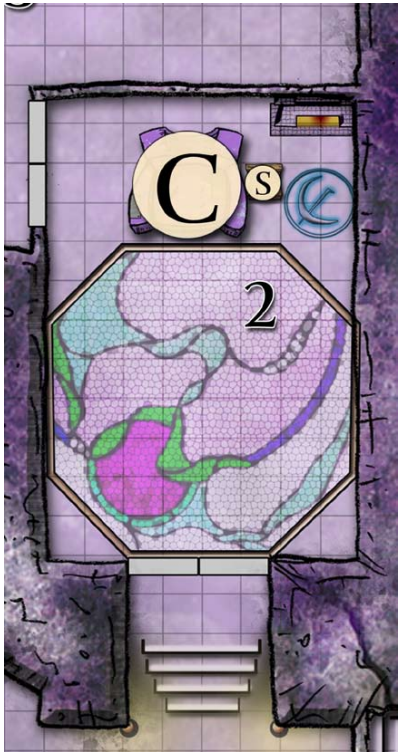
B5: Throne Room Showdown

Encounter Level 17 (9,600 XP)

Setup

Cachlain, the Stone-Skinned King (C)
Sovacles, Cachlain's Advisor (S)

This encounter begins after Sovacles calls the PCs back to his throne room and accuses them of allying with Sangwyr and compromising the king's palace.



Cachlain, the Stone-Skinned King (C) — **Level 20 Elite Soldier**
Huge fey humanoid — XP 5,600

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +18; truesight 6
HP 388; **Bloodied** 194; see also *cracked stone*
AC 36; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 32
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8, fly 2 (hover)
Action Points 1

Slam (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +27 vs. AC; 2d10 + 7 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.

Evil Eye (minor 1/round; at will) ✦ **Charm**
Ranged 10; +25 vs. Will; slide the target 3 squares, and the target makes a melee basic attack against a target of Cachlain's choice.

Stone Swat (standard; recharge ⚄⚅)
Close blast 3; +27 vs. AC; 3d10 + 7 damage, and the target is pushed 2d4 squares and knocked prone.

Cracked Stone
While bloodied, Cachlain has a -2 penalty to defenses and his attacks deal 1d10 extra damage.

Stone Defense (immediate reaction, when hit and damaged by an attack; recharge ⚄⚄⚅)
Cachlain gains resist 5 to all damage until the end of his next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Bluff +21, Endurance +23, Intimidate +23
Str 22 (+16) **Dex** 12 (+11) **Wis** 17 (+13)
Con 26 (+18) **Int** 19 (+14) **Cha** 23 (+16)
Equipment robes, crown

Sovacles, Cachlain's Advisor (S) — **Level 18 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid (shapechanger) — XP 4,000

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +18
HP 340; **Bloodied** 170
AC 32; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 31
Resist poison 10
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Staff (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
+23 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 necrotic damage.

Ensnaring Coil (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 15; +22 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 5 necrotic damage and slide the target 4 squares.

Bane Quills (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Area burst 1 within 10; +22 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 5 poison damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and skill checks until the end of Sovacles's next turn.

Coils and Quills (standard; at-will)
Sovacles makes an *ensnaring coil* attack and a *bane quills* attack.

Poison Darkness (standard; encounter) ✦ **Poison**
Area burst 1 within 20; +22 vs. Fortitude; 3d6 + 7 poison damage. *Effect:* The burst becomes a zone of darkness until the end of Sovacles's next turn. Any creature that starts its turn within the zone takes 5 poison damage and is blinded (save ends). Sovacles can see through the darkness. *Sustain Minor:* The zone persists.

Serpent's Trickery (immediate interrupt, when targeted by an attack while an ally is adjacent; at-will)
Sovacles redirects the attack to an adjacent ally and shifts 1 square.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Draconic, Elven
Skills Arcana +20, Bluff +21, Diplomacy +21, History +20, Insight +18, Religion +20
Str 13 (+10) **Dex** 20 (+14) **Wis** 19 (+13)
Con 18 (+13) **Int** 22 (+15) **Cha** 25 (+16)
Equipment fine clothing, staff of office

Tactics

The PCs aren't meant to finish this fight by defeating both enemies. See "Development" and the "Release Cachlain's Mind" skill challenge.

Cachlain: Struggling against the control of Sovacles, the Stone-Skinned King becomes more reluctant to fight as the PCs gain successes in the skill challenge. He doesn't stop attacking, but he makes poor decisions. For instance, he might use his *evil eye* on a creature with a poor melee basic attack.

Sovacles: The advisor remains close to the king, using *serpent's trickery* to redirect attacks to the fomorian. He uses the attacks he redirects as evidence that the PCs are trying to kill the king. *Ensnaring coils* lets him move enemies into position to be hit by *bane quills* or Cachlain's attacks.

Development

Sovacles reveals his true motives after he becomes bloodied, or when the PCs succeed on the skill challenge and he realizes he has lost control over the king. Sovacles should be standing on the window in the floor when he makes his pronouncement.

When this happens, read:

Sovacles, wounded and angry, snarls, "You have no idea who you're dealing with! My queen has given me the power to destroy you easily! Tiamat will have all that you possess and more, and your blood is my gift to her! And I'm sure Cachlain's replacement will be more amenable to our commands."

Cachlain responds quickly, shouting out that he'll never let the god of greed steal what belongs to him. He gestures at the floor and his evil eye flashes green. Then, the plates of glass flutter away, opening a hole that drops the PCs and Sovacles to the gladiatorial arena below. The fall is 40 feet (4d10 falling damage). Remember that a character trained in Acrobatics can make a check as a free action to reduce the damage by half the result of the check.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light.

Fireplace: This fireplace is tall enough to contain Medium creatures. A creature that enters or starts its turn in the fireplace takes 5 fire damage.

Magic Circle: The arcane sigils carved into the floor here are used for scrying rituals by Sovacles, but they don't have any use during combat.

Throne: Cachlain's throne is blocking terrain for Medium creatures. A creature can climb onto it with a DC 13 Athletics check. The base of the throne is solid crystal, so it's not possible to walk under it.

Floor: The window floor is perfectly safe to walk on. Until Cachlain commands the floor to open, the floor's durability and magical protection keep it intact.

Doors: The southern door is locked by magic, and only Cachlain or Sovacles can command it to open. The door leading to Cachlain's bedchamber is unlocked and can be opened easily.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 5 squares (25 feet) high.

Moving into the Arena

If the combatants jump over to the arena floor, they enter the middle of a gladiatorial bout. You can grab a couple of eladrin Feydark gladiators from the "Arena of Blood" encounter, or pick whatever monsters you want for the battle on which the PCs and monsters intrude. You could instead use a handful of minions in the arena the unleashed animals can cut down, making the fight feel more chaotic.

B6: Arena of Blood

Encounter Level 20 (14,800 XP)
Encounter Level 21 (20,400 XP) if the gladiators fight for Virizan

Setup

1 blackroot treant (T)
4 eladrin Feydark gladiators (G)
Virizan, Exarch of Tiamat (S)

This encounter begins immediately after "B5. Throne Room Showdown." Virizan begins the encounter in his venom wisp form.

After the PCs land in the arena, read:

In the gladiatorial arena below you, a handful of eladrin gladiators fight an undead treant bound in place with massive cold iron chains. A crowd massed in dozens of cave mouths along the towering walls takes in the bout.

You see Sovacles plummet down and hear his body snap as he hits the purple crystal of the arena floor. The crowd cheers! Just when it appears that the advisor's threat is ended, his body evaporates and forms into a wispy green cloud with smoky wings.

The PCs keep the same initiative, and Virizan goes at the same time Sovacles did. Roll initiative for the treant and gladiators.

Throughout the fight, Virizan reveals the following information:

- *"You have destroyed my human guise! Still, I have four more forms that can defeat you easily! Now you know you face Virizan, exarch of Her Dark Majesty Tiamat! All in this room will take my secret to their graves!"*
- *"Cachlain won't last long! Sangwyr marches, and the fomorian weakling's forces can't stop him alone. Tiamat covets this domain and it will be hers, and Sangwyr will be a perfect puppet upon the throne."*
- *"Do not think I ever underestimated you. You defeated Chillreaver, so you're clearly skilled. None of Tiamat's exarchs falls easily!"*
- *"I have no illusions that I am the strongest of Tiamat's exarchs. Even if you defeat me, you can't stop us all!"*

The venom wisp form is described in the readaloud text above, and the other three forms are described below.

Release Cachlain's Mind — **Level 18**
Skill Challenge — XP 6,000

The fomorian king is fighting against Sovacles's control, even while attacking you. He squints his eyes and shakes his head as though he were trying to banish unwanted visions.

While they fight the Stone-Skinned King and Sovacles, the PCs can attempt to free the monarch from his advisor's control. Each PC can attempt a skill check as a minor action once per round to contribute to this challenge.

Complexity
2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills
Arcana, Diplomacy, Insight, Intimidate.

Other Skills
Heal.

Victory
Sovacles reveals his true intentions, and Cachlain changes the fight. See "Development."

Defeat
The PCs realize they can't end the enchantment through their efforts. (They need to wait until they drop Sovacles below his bloodied value before the events of "Development" occur.)

Special (1 success, maximum 1 success)
If the PCs succeeded on the skill challenge in "Audience with the King," they gain an automatic success.

Special (1 success, no maximum successes)
The PC makes one of Sovacles's attacks hit Cachlain, either by redirecting the attack, dominating Sovacles, or by luring Sovacles to use a multitarget attack that hits the fomorian.

Special (2 successes, no maximum successes)
If the PC uses *dispel magic* on the king, it can't totally overpower the enchantment, but it severely weakens Sovacles's control.

Arcana DC 25 (1 success, no maximum successes)
Fighting power with power, the PC recites countermagic to reverse Sovacles's enchantment.

Diplomacy DC 20 (1 success, no maximum successes)
The PC reasons with Cachlain, convincing him the PCs aren't his enemies. Increase the DC to 25 if the PC has attacked Cachlain during this encounter.

Heal DC 13 (no successes)
By healing Cachlain's wounds, the PC gains a +5 bonus to his or her next check in the skill challenge, and Cachlain won't attack that PC (save ends).

Insight DC 20 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)
The PC points out that Sovacles is becoming more blatant and is flaunting his control over the king.

Intimidate DC 25 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)
The PC berates Cachlain for letting Sovacles order him around.

To describe the naga form, read:

Virizan transforms into an enormous, coiled serpent with a humanoid face. A row of green quills run down his spine, and longer spines jut out from the tip of his muscular tail. Peals of thunder sound at his command.

To describe the snake swarm form, read:

The exarch's body rips into pieces, which become writhing snakes as they fall to the ground. A swarm of the creatures crawls across the ground, baring fangs that drip with venom.

To describe the snaketongue form, read:

Virizan assumes the guise of a human creature with scaled skin. He produces his staff of office, now twisted and warped into the image of a hooded serpent.

Blackroot Treant (T) **Level 19 Elite Soldier**
Huge fey magical beast (plant, undead) **XP 4,800**
Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +13; low-light vision
Blackroot Aura (Healing, Necrotic) aura 2; each enemy that starts its **turn** within the aura takes 10 necrotic damage, while an undead ally that starts its turn within the aura regains 10 hit points.
HP 368; **Bloodied** 184
AC 36; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 32
Vulnerable fire (a blackroot treant takes ongoing 5 fire damage [save ends] when damaged by fire).
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6 (forest walk)
Action Points 1
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Reach 3; +25 vs. AC; 1d12 + 8 damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).
⸸ **Entangling Roots** (minor; at-will)
Reach 4; +23 vs. Reflex; the target is knocked prone and restrained (save ends). If the blackroot treant moves, slides, or is pushed more than 4 squares from the target, the target is no longer restrained.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Elven
Skills Nature +18, Stealth +16
Str 27 (+17) **Dex** 14 (+11) **Wis** 18 (+13)
Con 24 (+16) **Int** 16 (+12) **Cha** 22 (+15)

4 Eladrin Feydark Gladiators (G) **Level 16 Soldier**
Medium fey humanoid **XP 1,400 each**
Initiative +17 **Senses** Perception +9; low-light vision
HP 154; **Bloodied** 77
AC 32; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 26
Saving Throws +5 against charm effects
Speed 6
⊕ **Spear** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+23 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the gladiator's next turn.
⸸ **Bloodletting Stab** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
+23 vs. AC; 3d8 + 7 damage. If the gladiator has combat advantage against the target, the target takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends).
Gladiator's Cage
An enemy flanked by the gladiator takes a -5 penalty to attack rolls.
Fey Step (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The eladrin Feydark gladiator teleports 5 squares.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Str 21 (+13) **Dex** 24 (+15) **Wis** 13 (+9)
Con 18 (+12) **Int** 15 (+10) **Cha** 16 (+11)
Equipment scale armor, spear

Tactics

The fight between the PCs is the heart of this encounter, and the gladiators and treant introduce chaos into the battle.

Eladrin Feydark Gladiators: Neutral parties, the gladiators fight for whichever side the crowd is behind. Though fickle, the crowd supports the PCs. They can also fight the PCs after being hit with Virizan's *overwhelm mind* power.

Blackroot Treant: Driven mad with rage, the treant lashes out indiscriminately. See the sidebar.

Virizan: No longer hidden in human form, this exarch of Tiamat can shapechange constantly. He uses *mind spike* each turn, and *overwhelm mind* when possible. Virizan chooses his form based on the abilities he needs.

Virizan, Exarch of Tiamat (S) Level 18 Solo Controller
Medium natural humanoid (shapechanger) XP 10,000

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +18
Shifting Body Track hit points separately for each of Virizan's forms. He is bloodied once two forms have dropped to 0 hit points, and he is defeated when all forms have dropped to 0 hit points. See also *death change*.
AC 32; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 31
Resist determined by current shape
Saving Throws +5
Speed determined by current shape
Action Points 2

Mindspike (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 10; targets one creature in burst; +22 vs. Will; 3d6 psychic damage, and ongoing 5 psychic (save ends).

Overwhelm Mind (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Charm**
Ranged 20; targets a creature taking ongoing psychic damage; +22 vs. Will; the target is dominated (save ends).

Exarch's Shape (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**
Virizan changes to one of the forms below. The form must have more than 0 hit points.

Death Change (when current form is reduced to 0 hit points)
Virizan uses *exarch's shape*, and the new form takes damage equal to half the damage of the effect that reduced the previous form to 0 hit points.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Draconic, Elven
Skills Arcana +20, Bluff +21, Diplomacy +21, History +20, Insight +18, Religion +20
Str 13 (+10) **Dex** 20 (+14) **Wis** 19 (+13)
Con 18 (+13) **Int** 22 (+15) **Cha** 25 (+16)
Equipment fine clothing, staff of office

Naga Form Only
Large natural magical beast (reptile, shapechanger)
HP 170
Speed 6

Tail Slap (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +23 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.

Exarch's Thunder (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder**
Area burst 10 within 20; +22 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 7 thunder damage. *Miss:* Half damage.

Snake Swarm Form Only
Medium natural magical beast (reptile, shapechanger, swarm)
Swarm Attack aura 1; each enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 7 damage.
HP 170
Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 10 against close and area attacks
Speed 6; ignores difficult terrain

Swarm of Fangs (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+23 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage, and ongoing 5 poison (save ends).

Snaketongue Form Only
Medium natural humanoid (shapechanger)
HP 170
Resist 10 poison
Speed 6

Serpent Staff (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+23 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 poison damage.

Emerald Coils (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Ranged 20; two targets; +22 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 7 poison damage, and slide the target 3 squares.

Venom Wisp Form Only
Medium natural magical beast (shapechanger)
HP 120
Immune poison; **Resist** insubstantial
Speed 0, fly 8 (altitude limit 3, hover)

Venomous Claws (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+23 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 poison damage.

Caustic Breath (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Virizan shifts his speed and makes an attack at any point during that movement; close blast 3; +22 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 7 poison damage. *Miss:* Half damage.

Artillery: When enemies can't reach him, the exarch chooses naga form to make artillery-style area attacks. He also uses it when he needs to push foes away.

Control: To move enemies around (to push them into the pit or within the treant's reach), Virizan uses snaketongue form.

Melee: When he wants to enter melee combat or is surrounded, Virizan chooses his snake swarm form.

Defense and Mobility: To cover a lot of ground, or to reduce the damage he's taking, the exarch changes to venom wisp form to gain flying and insubstantial.

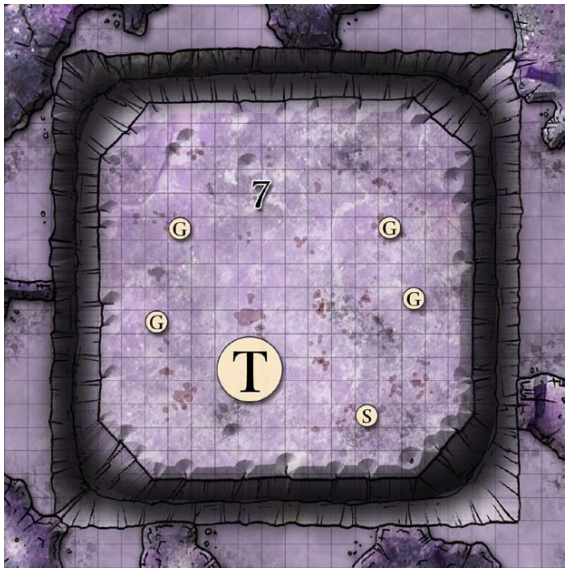
Tough Fight

If the PCs are low on resources, and you don't want the fight to turn into an endless series of at-will attacks, use the following variant rule: Each time a PC saves against *overwhelm mind*, that creature regains an encounter attack power.

The Treant Is Terrain

In this battle, the blackroot is treated more like a hazard than a monster. The treant doesn't give experience points by default, though you can give out full or partial XP if the PCs end up fighting and defeating the treant for some reason.

- Cold iron chains bind the treant. It is immobilized and can't be forced to move by a push, pull, or slide. The chains have AC 4; other defenses 12; break DC 30; hp 120.
- The treant treats everyone as an enemy, including the PCs, Virizan, and the gladiators.
- It makes opportunity attacks against anyone it can.
- On its turn, it uses *entangling roots* and its slam attack against random targets within reach.



Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light.

Pit: The crevasse that surrounds the arena floor is 4 squares (20 feet) deep. A creature that falls in takes 2d10 damage from the fall. The sides require a DC 20 Athletics check to climb.

Ledges: The towering walls are honeycombed with cave mouths that serve as viewing areas for a diverse audience of fey creatures. The lowest ledges (shown on the map) are 2 squares (10 feet) higher than the floor of the arena, and the walls around them require a DC 20 Athletics check to climb.

Audience Participation

Audience members pack the viewing ledges. They cheer for exciting attacks and might help the PCs if they've been fighting well. This could include distracting Virizan, drawing the treant away from PCs, or dropping ropes to help a PC out of the pit.

Appendix: New Monsters

Cyclops Slaver

Tasked with procuring slaves for their fomorian masters, cyclops slavers craft the specialized tools they use to capture their targets.

Cyclops Slaver	Level 15 Controller
Large fey humanoid	XP 1,200
Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +15; truesight	
HP 149; **Bloodied** 74	
AC 29; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 25	
Speed 7	
Spear (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Reach 2; +20 vs. AC; 2d10 + 4 damage.	
Shuriken (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Ranged 6/12; +20 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage.	
Evil Eye (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Sleep**	
Ranged sight; the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls against the cyclops slaver until the end of the encounter or until the slaver uses *evil eye* against a different target.	
Barbed Net (standard; requires net; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Weapon**	
Close blast 4; +19 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target is restrained and takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends both).	
Sleep Powder Flask (standard; encounter) ✦ **Sleep**	
Area burst 1 within 10; +19 vs. Fortitude; the target is slowed (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is knocked unconscious instead of slowed (save ends).	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Elven	
Skills Stealth +19	
Str 20 (+12) **Dex** 24 (+14) **Wis** 17 (+10)	
Con 21 (+12) **Int** 11 (+7) **Cha** 10 (+7)	
Equipment leather armor, spear, 3 nets, 10 shuriken, 1 sleep powder flask	

Cyclops Slaver Lore

Arcana DC 18: Fomorians seek more slaves to do their work for them. The misshapen giants trust the work of collecting slaves to their cyclops followers. The slave masters create barbed nets and alchemical sleep powder, and set out to distant lands in search of new creatures to enslave.

Cyclops Slaver Tactics

After using *barbed net* to restrain as many targets as it can, a slaver moves back and lets its allies beat on the enemies. Slavers use *evil eye* on strikers or other characters with primarily single-target attacks. The slavers' alchemical sleeping powder is difficult to create and requires rare substances, so they throw their flasks only when desperate. Slaves aren't much good when they're dead, so a slaver can throw its barbed net inside-out, and the target doesn't take ongoing damage.

Eladrin

In the world, eladrin are exceptional. In the Feywild, though, they're more common, and many serve as rank and file or find odd paths of employment.

Eladrin Winter Blade	Level 14 Soldier Minion
Medium fey humanoid, eladrin	XP 250
Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion	
AC 30; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 24	
Saving Throws +5 against charm effects	
Speed 6	
Winter Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Weapon**	
+21 vs. AC; 8 cold damage.	
Fey Step (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**	
The eladrin winter blade teleports 5 squares.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Elven	
Str 20 (+12) **Dex** 23 (+13) **Wis** 12 (+8)	
Con 14 (+9) **Int** 15 (+9) **Cha** 16 (+10)	
Equipment leather, longsword	

Eladrin Winter Blade Lore

Arcana DC 11: The rank and file of armies mustered by the Winter Court, eladrin winter blades don't have much combat training. Most aren't soldiers by trade, and they rely on the small amount of longsword training all eladrin receive. They carry blades that develop frost when carried by eladrin from the Winter Court.

Eladrin Winter Blade Tactics

When fighting with mostly other eladrin, winter blades follow orders, and they take the brunt of assaults. If they're grouped with other creatures who are better suited to fighting on the front lines, the eladrin teleport to surprise the enemies behind the first rank.

Eladrin Feydark Gladiator	Level 16 Soldier
Medium fey humanoid	XP 1,400
Initiative +17	**Senses** Perception +9; low-light vision
HP 154; **Bloodied** 77	
AC 32; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 26	
Saving Throws +5 against charm effects	
Speed 6	
Spear (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+23 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the gladiator's next turn.	
Bloodletting Stab (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**	
+23 vs. AC; 3d8 + 7 damage. If the gladiator has combat advantage against the target, the target takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends).	
Gladiator's Cage	
An enemy flanked by the gladiator takes a -5 penalty to attack rolls.	
Fey Step (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**	
The eladrin Feydark gladiator teleports 5 squares.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Elven
Str 21 (+13)	**Dex** 24 (+15) **Wis** 13 (+9)
Con 18 (+12)	**Int** 15 (+10) **Cha** 16 (+11)
Equipment scale armor, spear	

Eladrin Feydark Gladiator Lore

Arcana DC 20: Many fomorian kings love gladiatorial combat, and they seek all sorts of warriors and creatures to fight in their arenas. They especially prize eladrin slaves, because the fomorians love gloating over an eladrin's pain.

Eladrin Feydark Gladiator Tactics

Experts in arena combat, eladrin Feydark gladiators prefer to fight in pairs (gaining the benefit of *gladiator's cage*). If they need to move into battle, they do so carefully instead of rushing in, and they save *fey step* in case they need to escape from the heat of battle.

Firbolg Dusk Harrier

In the Wild Hunt, dusk harriers flush out prey and assist other firbolgs as they chase down their quarry.

Firbolg Dusk Harrier	Level 13 Elite Skirmisher
Large fey humanoid	XP 1,600
Initiative +17	**Senses** Perception +17; low-light vision
HP 322; **Bloodied** 161	
Regeneration 5	
AC 31; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 27	
Vulnerable necrotic (if Pyradan takes necrotic damage, his regeneration doesn't function on his next turn)	
Saving Throws +2; +4 against charm effects, immobilized, restrained, and slowed	
Speed 8	
Action Points 1	
Spear (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Reach 2; +22 vs. AC; 2d10 + 5 damage.	
Javelin (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Ranged 10/20; +22 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.	
Double Attack (standard; at-will)	
Pyradan makes two spear attacks, and slides one hit target 1 square. Pyradan then shifts 3 squares.	
Moonfire (minor 1/round; recharge ⚅⚄⚃)	
Ranged 10; +20 vs. Will; until the end of Pyradan's next turn, the target cannot benefit from invisibility or concealment, and Pyradan gains combat advantage against the target.	
Forest of Spears (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Weapon**	
Close burst 2; targets enemies; +22 vs. AC; 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target is either slowed (save ends) or takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends). On a critical hit, the target takes both effects.	
Deadly Flanker	
When an ally flanks with Pyradan, that ally deals 1d8 extra damage with attacks against the flanked creature.	
Harrier's Flank (immediate reaction, when an ally moves adjacent to a creature within 2 squares of Pyradan; at-will)	
Pyradan shifts 2 squares. He must end this shift in a flanking position with the ally who triggered this power.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Acrobatics +19, Athletics +20, Intimidate +15, Nature +17	
Str 22 (+14)	**Dex** 25 (+15) **Wis** 18 (+12)
Con 17 (+11)	**Int** 13 (+9) **Cha** 15 (+10)
Equipment hide armor, 2 spears, 4 javelins	

Firbolg Dusk Harrier Lore

Arcana DC 11: Among the Wild Hunt, firbolg dusk harriers occupy a support role, and they set up their prey to be slaughtered. They hunt both beasts and people, adapting their skills to both situations. Masters of a fighting style that uses two spears (one with a hooked point), dusk harriers can attack rapidly, and they drag their foes into the middle of the hunting party.

Arcana DC 18: Other firbolg hunters judge dusk harriers harshly, and a dusk harrier is shunned if he or she fails to be fully effective in combat. A dusk harrier expelled from a hunting party might become a hermit or run with a pack of wild beasts. A few, however, become enforcers or commanders for fomorians or archfey. Still, they refuse to teach firbolg secrets—especially the dusk harriers' two-spear fighting style.

Firbolg Dusk Harrier Tactics

Rarely found without other melee warriors to fight alongside, firbolg dusk harriers use their mobility and *harrier's flank* to help their allies. When encountering intelligent prey, they use psychological warfare, taunting their enemies. When fighting an adventuring party or other group, a dusk harrier repeatedly attacks the weakest target if doing so provokes desperate actions from others within the group. For instance, a dusk harrier might repeatedly strike at a wizard if that causes defenders and leaders to disengage from other foes to protect the wizard.

Portal Hound

Part physical flesh and part magical energy, a portal hound can teleport itself and other creatures easily.

Portal Hound	Level 16 Controller
Medium fey beast	XP 1,400
Initiative +15	**Senses** Perception +21; low-light vision
Portal Aura (**Teleportation**) aura 2; when an enemy starts its turn within the aura, the portal hound can teleport that creature to a different square within the aura.	
HP 150; **Bloodied** 75	
AC 30; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 28	
Speed 7, teleport 7	
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)	
+21 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage.	
⸸ **Dimensional Jaws** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**	
+21 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the portal hound makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +22 vs. Will; the target is teleported 10 squares.	
⇜ **Portal Walk** (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**	
The portal hound attacks, then teleports itself to a square within 10 of it; close burst 1; +21 vs. Will; the target is teleported into a square adjacent to the portal hound, after the hound teleports.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 16 (+11)	**Dex** 24 (+15)	**Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 14 (+10)	**Int** 5 (+5)	**Cha** 19 (+12)

Portal Hound Lore

Arcana DC 13: These hounds of the Feywild seethe with magical power, which causes them to manifest extraordinary abilities of teleportation. Even their jaws warp and shift, allowing them to transport their quarry with a simple bite. Though wild portal hounds are cunning predators, the creatures are even more dangerous when trained by firbolgs, who use them to corner their enemies.

Arcana DC 20: Because of their unique abilities, portal hounds live and stalk prey in unusual terrain. In marshy areas, around cliffs, among dangerous vegetation, and near rushing water, portal hounds use their teleportation abilities to trap prey on isolated or dangerous terrain. They then try to push or frighten the prey into dangerous places (into brambles, off precipices, or into rushing water, for example) to weaken or kill it.

Portal Hound Tactics

The versatile allotment of teleportation powers portal hounds possess are useful in any situation. When trained by firbolgs, portal hounds use precise teleportation to trap foes. Wild portal hounds, on the other hand, target weak foes (especially bloodied and lightly armored enemies), teleporting their prey and themselves away from other combatants to go one-on-one.

Portal hounds are especially skilled at using terrain to their advantage. Include thorns, wildfires, or other hazardous terrain into which the portal hound can teleport PCs.

Encounter Groups

Although portal hounds are often trained by firbolgs, feral members of the breed form packs with fey animals.

Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,800)

- ✦ 1 displacer beast packlord (level 13 elite skirmisher, *Monster Manual* page 70)
- ✦ 2 portal hounds (level 16 controller)
- ✦ 2 thunderfury boars (level 15 brute, *Monster Manual* page 35)

Scarred Bulette

Tortured by servants of fomorians, these bulettes have been inculcated into blind obedience to their misshapen masters.

Scarred Bulette	**Level 15 Elite Skirmisher**
Large natural beast	XP 2,400
Initiative +14	**Senses** Perception +10; darkvision, tremorsense 20
HP 304; **Bloodied** 152	
AC 29; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 23	
Vulnerable charm (a tortured bulette hit by a charm attack is immobilized until the end of its next turn)	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 6, burrow 6	
Action Points 1	
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)	
Before it bites, the bulette can make a standing long jump (as a free action) without provoking opportunity attacks; +20 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage, or 4d8 + 6 damage against a prone target.	
⸸ **Earth Furrow** (move; at-will)	
The scarred bulette moves its burrow speed just below the surface of the ground, avoiding opportunity attacks as it passes underneath other creatures' spaces. As it burrows beneath the space of a Medium or smaller creature on the ground, the bulette makes an attack against the creature; +14 vs. Fortitude; the target is knocked prone.	
✧ **Rising Burst** (standard; the bulette must have emerged from the ground after burrowing this turn; at-will)	
Close burst 2; the bulette sprays rocks and dirt into the air when it rises out of the ground; +19 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage.	
Spray of Tainted Blood (when an adjacent creature hits the scarred bulette with a melee attack)	
The attacker takes a -2 penalty to Fortitude until the end of the scarred bulette's next turn.	
Habituated to Torture	
While the scarred bulette is bloodied, it gains a +2 bonus to all defenses and to speed.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Skills Athletics +20, Endurance +19	
Str 27 (+15)	**Dex** 21 (+12)	**Wis** 16 (+10)
Con 24 (+14)	**Int** 2 (+3)	**Cha** 11 (+7)

Scarred Bulette Lore

Nature DC 18: Though bulettes live primarily in the world, a few are found living in the Feywild or are taken there to serve as pets or beasts of burden for powerful fey. Fomorians who capture bulettes have them tortured for years, until the beasts' wills are broken. These obedient bulettes are covered in scars, and their blood has become tainted by magical toxins.

Scarred Bulette Tactics

In most ways, a scarred bulette fights like any other bulette, burrowing beneath opponents to knock them over and using *rising burst* when it emerges from the ground. However, since it doesn't have *second wind*, a scarred bulette is more likely to keep fighting after being wounded. After a creature hits the bulette and triggers its *spray of tainted blood*, the bulette uses earth furrow to move beneath that creature and take advantage of its weakened Fortitude.

Scarred bulettes are rarely encountered without masters. It takes great effort and years to turn a bulette into this monstrosity, and no one who possesses a scarred bulette wants its efforts to be wasted.

About the Author

Logan Bonner has worked on *D&D Miniatures*™, *Forgotten Realms® Player's Guide*, *Adventurer's Vault*™, *Player's Handbook® 2*, and *Arcane Power*™ in his time as a designer at Wizards of the Coast. He has designed both familiars and alchemy, encouraging people to be both social and anti-social.

Storm Tower

By Christopher Perkins

An adventure for 3rd-level characters

illustrations by Mike Krahulik and Scott Kurtz
maps by Jason A. Engle and Mike Schley

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"Storm Tower" is a Dungeons & Dragons® *adventure designed for five 3rd-level characters. It begins in the town of Fallcrest, described in Chapter 11 of the Dungeon Master's Guide. The player characters have been in Fallcrest for a short while, perhaps enjoying some "down time" between adventures, and just long enough for rumors of their heroism to begin circulating among the locals.*

BACKGROUND

The fortified town of Fallcrest faces many threats, among them encroaching monsters from the borderlands, where civilization meets the harsh, untamed wilderness. Goblins and giants are of particular concern. To hold them back, the Lord Warden of Fallcrest ordered the reconstruction of a damaged tower that once kept watch over the Witchlight Fens to the south and the Ogrefist Hills to the west. He hired a team of dwarf stonemasons from the stronghold of Hammerfast and sent them to the tower. Nathan Faringray, a captain in the town militia, was assigned to protect them. Faringray and a dozen warriors accompanied the dwarves to the tower, where they set up camp.

While Faringray and his retinue were away, the Fallcrest Guard suffered significant losses defending the King's Road from monstrous brigands. A week ago, Faringray was summoned back to Fallcrest to help train new recruits for the town guard. He left his retinue at the tower and rode back to town, believing that the stonemasons were adequately protected. But he was wrong.

Yesterday, while training raw recruits in the cold, muddy fields west of Fallcrest, Nathan Faringray was surprised to see Sorik Orvash, one of the dwarf stonemasons, staggering along the road toward town. The captain confronted Sorik and learned that brigands had attacked the ruined tower the previous morning. Sorik described the gang of brigands as a mixture of armored humans and walking skeletons. The humans looked haggard, their faces painted to resemble yellow skulls. This evil force overcame the guards at the tower, yet Sorik escaped. Taking advantage of the fog and rain, he fled unseen.

The Lord Warden has instructed Captain Faringray to dispatch another force to reclaim the tower. Rather than risk more of the town's militia, Faringray has decided to hire a party of adventurers. He has heard reports that such a party currently resides in Fallcrest, and that these adventurers can be trusted with such an important task.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In early 2008, Wizards of the Coast teamed up with the mad geniuses of Penny Arcade to create a very special D&D 4th Edition podcast. James Wyatt and I ran a group of upstarts through an abbreviated version of *Keep on the Shadowfell*, the first 4th Edition adventure. Our players included Mike "Gabe" Krahulik and Jerry "Tycho" Holkins of Penny Arcade (www.penny-arcade.com) and special guest star Scott Kurtz of PVP (www.pvponline.com). Together they formed Acquisitions Incorporated, a party of adventurers in search of fame and fortune—more fortune than fame, actually. Split into eight hilarious segments, the podcast proved a resounding success, with almost half a million hits on the Internet. The members of Acquisitions, Inc.—Jim Darkmagic, Omin, and Binwin Bronzebottom—became instant legends in the real world.

In December of 2008, Penny Arcade teamed up with Wizards once again for a sequel. Mike, Jerry, and Scott needed another fix. This time, however, we added actor Wil Wheaton to the mix, playing the party intern. Wil's character was an elf avenger named Aeofel, and as it turns out, the very survival of Acquisitions Incorporated would rest on his slender shoulders.

The adventure, which had the working title "Penny Arcade and the Tower of Storms," wasn't written to be humorous. Quite the contrary. I always knew the humor would come from the players, not the set-up . . . and certainly not the DM. The encounters took 8 hours to complete, at which point we had to cut things short. (Turns out I had another D&D game across town that evening.) We probably could've finished the adventure sooner, but as happens when you run a game for cartoonists and actors, expeditious play often takes a back seat to wacky hijinks.

If you want to know how Acquisitions Incorporated fared, listen to the podcasts. The first one can be found here. I'm not going to tell you which characters died, if any. You'll have to do your research! I will say that Jim Darkmagic and the gang had a tough go this time 'round, and Mike's temper tantrum in the eighth hour is true magic and should be remembered in song.

In closing, I'd like to add that the adventure you're reading isn't *exactly* the same as the adventure I ran for Mike, Jerry, Scott, and Wil. As a DM, I make impromptu changes to an adventure while running it, usually to heighten the tension or surprise the players. I encourage you to exercise similar license and not be bound by what's written here. I also made a couple alterations to surprise players who listen to the podcast and think they know everything. You can thank me later.

—Chris Perkins

Adventure Synopsis

When the PCs take the task, they must first venture to Vanamere's Tower, where they find Yellowskull bandits. After the combat with this group, the watching spirit of Vanamere allows them into the tower. Once inside, the PCs encounter more bandits and several traps. Hopefully, they also free the dwarf survivors. Eventually they have to figure out how to get into the vault, and once they do that, they can find the skull that the bandits sought.

"Is it one, two, three, and then we go. Or is it one, two, and then we go on three?"
A thirteen means you are blasted by three of them.
sixteen fire damage and you are on fire.
"Yay!"

Starting the Adventure

The adventure begins in Fallcrest. The heroes are relaxing inside one of the local inns, such as the Nentir Inn or the Silver Unicorn Inn. Begin the adventure by reading the following aloud.

Thick curtains of rain fall outside, turning the streets to mud, and peals of thunder resound in the distance. Your evening's rest comes to an abrupt end when a figure enters the inn and slams the door behind him. His shoddy cloak is drenched, and when he pulls back the cowl, you see that he's a young tiefling boy. He nods to the innkeeper sheepishly, then slinks toward you. From within the folds of his cloak, he produces a dry, unsealed letter and hands it to you.

This 12-year-old tiefling ne'er-do-well is named Tirion Blackhorn. He lives with a family of human farmers in Fallcrest. The letter is from Captain Nathan Faringray of the Fallcrest Guard. Tirion hands the letter to one of the heroes, having already taken the time to read it himself. He sticks around long enough to see if the heroes offer him a token payment, then darts back outside and slips away into the rain.

Captain Faringray's letter reads as follows:

Good folk,

I have heard tales of your heroism and wish to employ your services. Adventure awaits in the borderlands! The Lord Warden of Fallcrest has authorized me to pay well for your time and effort.

If this offer intrigues you, look for me in the fields west of Fallcrest tomorrow morning. Simply take the western ferry across the river and walk to the outskirts of town. You will find me there.

With respect and regards,
Captain Nathan Faringray of the Fallcrest Guard

If the heroes accept Faringray's invitation, read or paraphrase the following text:

The next morning, you head west through the rain and fog. A short ferry ride brings you to the western shore of the river. You march along a muddy road past farmers' dwellings until you see an open field of tilled earth and thicker mud. In the middle of the field scream a dozen militia recruits. They attack one another with wild abandon, swinging wooden swords and shields. Watching them with dismay is a cloaked man on horseback. Near him, standing in a puddle by the road, is a dour dwarf smoking a pipe. Rain pours off his wide-brimmed hat.

The figure on horseback is Captain Nathan Faringray, a handsome 40-year-old man. The captain introduces the dwarf as Sorik Orvash, a stonemason from distant Hammerfast, a dwarven hold in the eastern Dawnforge Mountains.

What Faringray Knows

When questioned, Captain Faringray imparts the following information:

- ✦ Some months ago, Faren Markelhay, the Lord Warden of Fallcrest, hired a group of six dwarf stonemasons to rebuild a ruined tower to the west. Faringray was assigned to protect them.
- ✦ Faringray and his retinue of six well-trained guards accompanied the dwarves to the tower. Reconstruction efforts were underway and things were moving apace until Faringray was summoned back to Fallcrest to train new warriors for the town guard. He thought he was leaving the tower in capable hands, however.
- ✦ The day before yesterday, a group of brigands attacked the tower and overwhelmed the guards and masons. Only Sorik escaped. Some of the brigands were humans clad in leather armor, their faces painted to resemble yellow skulls. The rest were clearly undead skeletons.
- ✦ In generations past, the tower was key to the town's defense, watching over the Cloak Wood to the north, the Witchlight Fens to the south, and the Ogrefist Hills farther west. Thirty-odd years ago, a legion of goblins and hill giants advanced from the Ogrefist Hills and attacked the tower, which had but one defender: a powerful elf wizard named Vanamere. No one knows what happened exactly, but when the battle was over, the giants were dead, the goblins were driven off, and Vanamere's tower was destroyed.
- ✦ For years, Fallcrest lacked the funds and the incentive to rebuild the tower. However, the growing threat of monsters prompted its reconstruction.
- ✦ Although he's not a skilled combatant, Sorik knows the fastest way to the tower and is willing to escort the characters there, provided they keep him out of harm's way.

Faringray would prefer to return to the tower and clean up his own mess, but his orders are clear: He must remain in Fallcrest to complete the training of the new recruits. Therefore, he asks the characters to investigate the tower, look for survivors, and deal with the mysterious brigands.

Major Quest: The PCs gain a 1,000 XP award for dealing with the brigands and rescuing the prisoners.

Treasure

This adventure can take a party of 3rd-level characters most of the way to 4th level. If you add an encounter or two, it certainly will. Distribute nine (or ten, if you add encounters) level 3 parcels in this adventure. A couple locations—area 1, area 2, and area 5—have suggested treasure. The bandits should have money and valuables, which can be multiple monetary parcels split up among them, but most of the significant treasure is in the hands of the named NPCs. If the PCs demand it, Faringway assures them that the Lord Warden will award them a monetary award that you devise from the parcels. For example, each brigand captured alive and returned to Fallcrest might garner the party 50 gp.

"I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A RELIGION CHECK."
YOU ARE PRETTY SURE THAT NOTHING IN THIS ROOM HAS ANY RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE AT ALL.
"SO PURELY CULINARY THEN...
...AN EVIL GUMBO."

Sorik Orvash

Sorik Orvash is the stereotypical "dour dwarf" and can barely contain his anger toward the brigands. He doesn't talk much during the return trip to the tower.

Sorik Orvash	**Level 3 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, dwarf	XP –
Initiative +1	**Senses** Perception +2; low-light vision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 14; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 12, **Will** 12	
Saving Throws +5 against poison effects	
Speed 5	
⊕ **Pick** (standard; at-will)	
+6 vs. AC; 4 damage, and Sorik shifts 1 square.	
Roll With It (immediate interrupt, when hit by an attack; encounter)	
Sorik can roll a saving throw to avoid damage from the attack. If he succeeds, he can shift 2 squares.	
Stand Your Ground	
When an effect pulls, pushes, or slides Sorik, Sorik moves 1 square less than the effect specifies. When an attack could knock Sorik prone, a successful save negates that effect.	
Alignment Good	**Languages** Common, Dwarven
Skills Dungeoneering +9, Endurance +10	
Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 10 (+1) **Wis** 13 (+2)
Con 16 (+4)	**Int** 12 (+2) **Cha** 11 (+1)
Equipment leather armor, pick, hat, pipe	

Weather

This adventure takes place during whichever season works best for your campaign, but regardless of the time of year, it rains constantly, and light fog shrouds every location the characters go. Ill weather is an important theme; rain and fog persist until the adventure is complete.

Rain and Light Fog: Weather lightly obscures anything within 5 squares of a viewer and heavily obscures anything 5 or more squares from a viewer.

Reaching the Tower

Vanamere's Tower lies 25 miles west of Fallcrest, on the far side of the Cloak Wood, on the northern edge of the Witchlight Fens. Faringray urges the characters to steer clear of the forest and instead suggests that they follow the Nentir River south until they come upon the Witchlight Fens. Then they can trudge west across rugged, grassy terrain while avoiding the fens. The total trek covers 30 miles. What's left of the tower sits atop a hill north of the fens and can be seen from 2 miles away on a clear day.

If the characters travel the route that Faringray suggests, the journey to the tower is dreary and uneventful. Feel free to insert an encounter with the creatures of the Witchlight Fens if the players are spoiling for a fight. Here's one you can use.

Encounter Level 4 (XP 875)

- ✦ 1 visejaw crocodile (level 4 soldier; *Monster Manual* page 45)
- ✦ 4 greenscale hunters (level 4 skirmisher; *Monster Manual* page 178)

If the characters ignore Faringray's advice and try to cut 5 miles off the journey by traveling through the Cloak Wood, use the following encounter to illustrate the dangers of the forest and why it's usually avoided. During the encounter, Sorik does his best to hide and avoid combat. If the characters are defeated, he flees.

Encounter Level 5 (XP 1,250)

- ✦ 1 goblin underboss (level 4 elite controller; *Monster Manual* page 138)
- ✦ 4 goblin skullcleavers (level 3 brute; *Monster Manual* page 137)
- ✦ 2 spitting drakes (level 3 artillery; *Monster Manual* page 91)

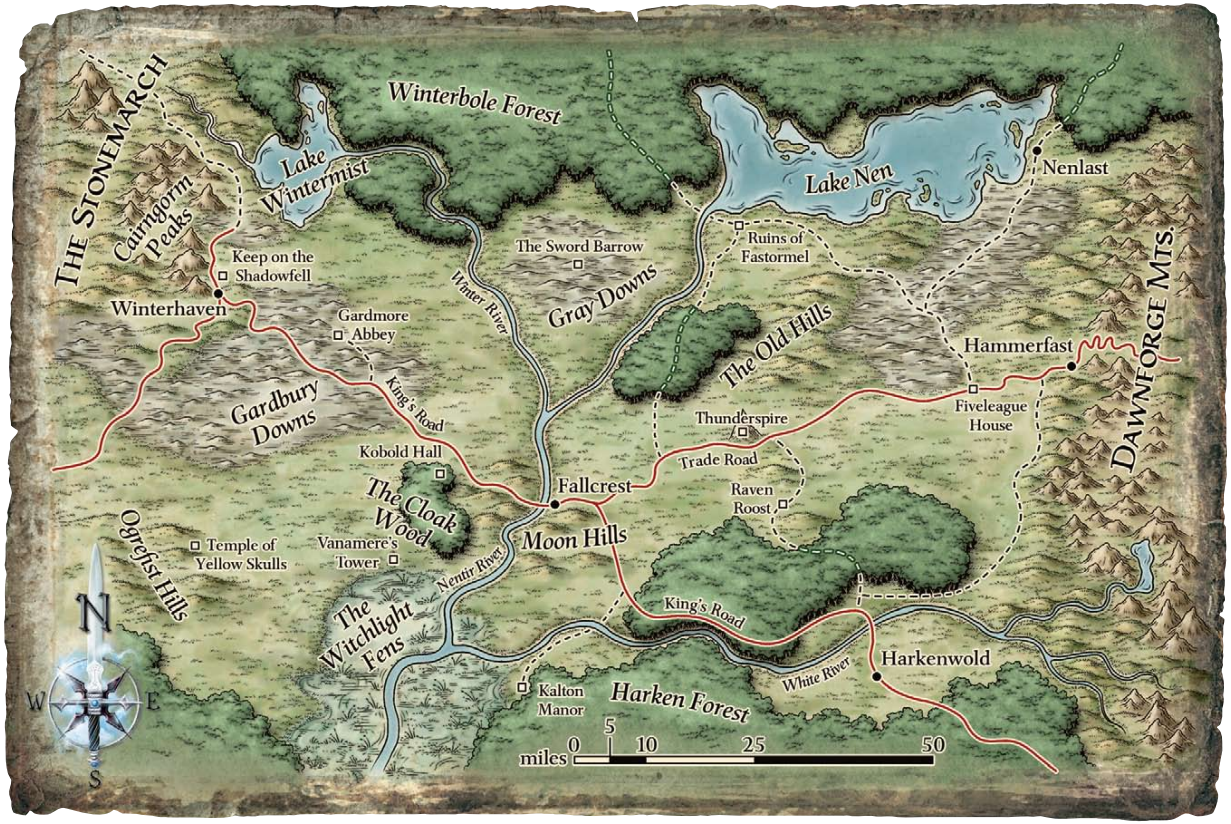
Vanamere's Tower

A pair of retired adventurers—an elf wizard named Vanamere and a human fighter named Lethion Goldenhawk—married and built this tower as a private residence, sinking a considerable amount of their accumulated wealth into the endeavor. Only later did the tower become important to the defense of Nentir Vale, and only after special agreements were reached with the owners.

When Lethion passed away, Vanamere placed his remains in a secret tomb carved out of the hill beneath the tower. With him she buried their remaining treasure, including magic items seized during their careers. One of the items entombed with Lethion was a gold-plated human skull, taken from the corpse of a gnoll demon-worshiper in the Ogrefist Hills. The golden skull is believed to be one of several stolen from the Temple of Yellow Skulls (see *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 208).

Goblins from the Ogrefist Hills and Witchlight Fens tried to overrun the tower on several occasions, but their attacks were rebuffed. Thirty-odd years ago, the goblins joined forces with a clan of ogres and a giant, and descended from the hills in force. They pounded the tower with rocks and broke through its defenses. Vanamere used a ritual to summon a mighty storm.

When they breached the tower, a great bolt of lightning struck its peak, causing the tower to explode. Jagged shards of rock killed most of the invaders. The magical attack so frightened the remaining monsters that they fled back into the hills, never to return. What became of Vanamere, no one knows. According to legend, when the lightning struck, she became one with the tower and remains trapped within its ruined walls to this day.



Arrival

When the characters approach within a mile of the tower, read the following (assuming Sorik Orvash is alive):

The rain and fog make it hard to discern your surroundings. Sorik looks at you wearily. "We're almost there," he says, leading you up a gentle hill dotted with head-sized chunks of gray stone half embedded in the ground. You also see bones lying amid the grass and weeds.

The skeletons are all that remain of those that attacked the tower around 30 years ago. No valuables can be gained by searching them.

When the characters reach the top of the hill, proceed with the first encounter.

Tactical Encounter: 1. Yellowskulls (page 57).

Once the encounter begins, the PCs can follow the trail of encounters through the tower areas until they finish what they came to do.

The Yellowskulls

The brigands who attacked the tower paint their faces to resemble yellow skulls and call themselves the Yellowskulls. They came from the Temple of Yellow Skulls, a ruin located in the Ogrefist Hills to the west. They were sent by their evil masters to retrieve a relic of the temple—a gold-plated skull—that was stolen years ago and is rumored to lie somewhere below Vanamere's tower. The leader of these brigands is a necromancer named Jeras Falck, but he is merely the henchman of a more powerful enemy. The identity of Falck's master is left up to you.

The Dungeon

Falck's lieutenants, Tregger and Lurash, are stationed here and they are guarding the six captured dwarf stonemasons.

Tactical Encounter: 2. The Dungeon (page 60).

Trapped Hall

Flameskulls can take cover behind the double doors here and make good use of trap positions to create a challenging combat environment for the PCs.

Tactical Encounter: 3. Trapped Hall (page 62).

Skull Cauldron

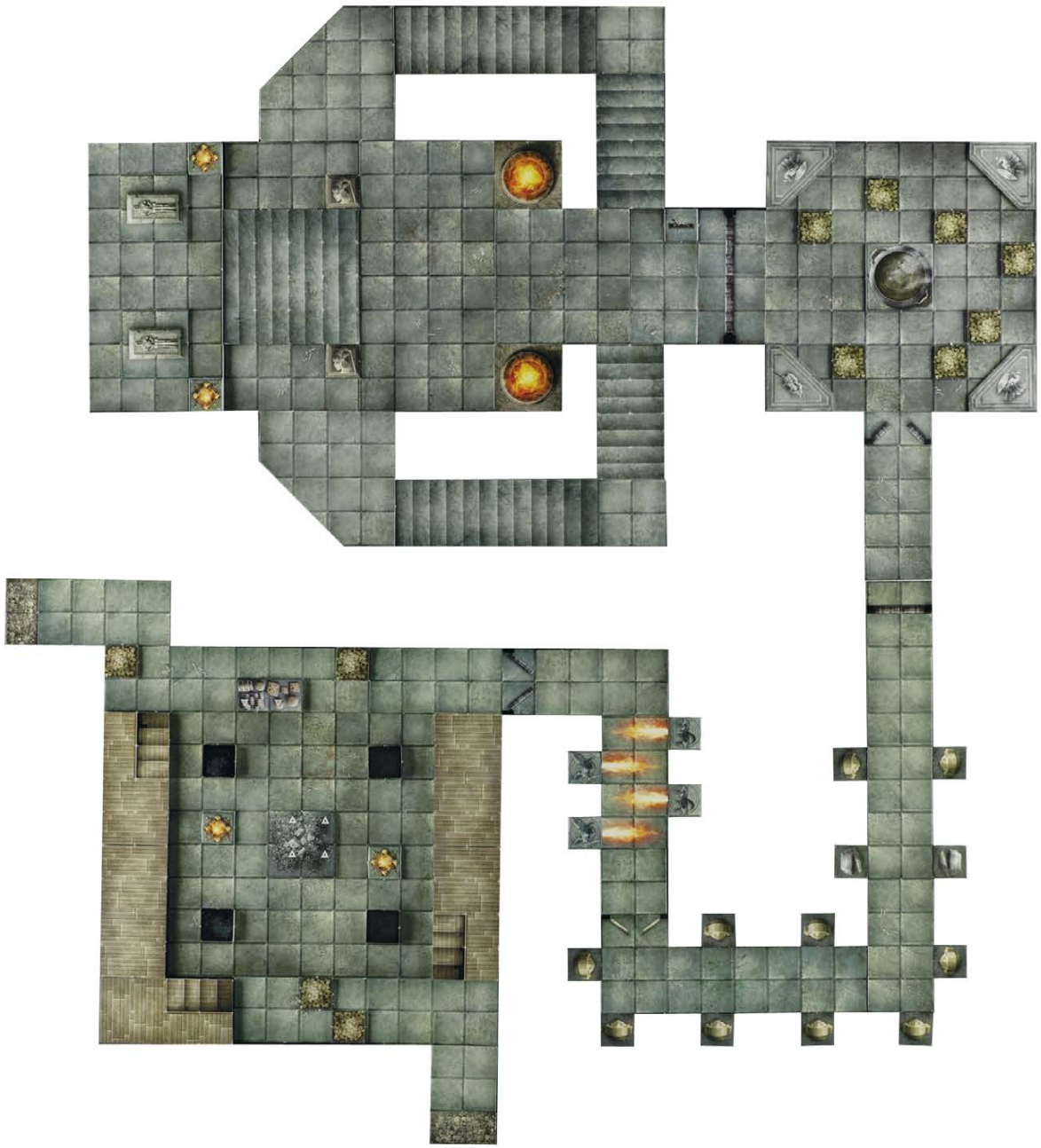
The cauldron here serves as the key to getting into the vault. If the PCs fail to deal with it correctly, they encounter the defenses for the vault.

Tactical Encounter: 4. Skull Cauldron (page 64).

The Vault

Once the vault opens, the PCs encounter Falck, who seeks the gold skull that is within the sarcophagus.

Tactical Encounter: 5. The Vault (page 66).



Encounter 1: Yellowskulls

Encounter Level 4 (878 XP)

Setup

Celk, Yellowskull Doppelganger (C)
4 Yellowskull bandits (B)
6 zombie rotters (Z)

When the Yellowskull bandits attacked the tower, Faringray's guards put up strong resistance. Eight bandits died. Jeras Falck took his revenge by turning the dead guards into zombies that now wander the hill. He then ordered four bandits and Celk, a doppelganger, to stand guard in and around the tower. Celk assumes the form of a dwarf stonemason named Tarjin Stoneheart and pretends to be the bandits' prisoner.

Place the bandits and Celk only when they come within 5 squares of the characters. Beyond that range, the rain and fog grant total concealment. The $zombie rotters are placed only after the battle is joined (see "Tactics" below).

When PCs reach the ruined tower, read:

Fog obscures your view of the hilltop, but as you ascend, you see a tower that has been reduced to a broken ring of mortared stone, punched through with gaping holes. It rises to a height of only 20 feet, its top resembling a jagged crown. The upper levels are gone, their remains scattered upon the hillside. Some large shrubs grow near the tower, and you also see a pair of drab tents and a smoldering campfire threatened by the rain.

When the characters and bandits meet, read:

Sullen men clad in leather armor, their faces painted to resemble yellow skulls, take aim with crossbows. Rain has streaked the paint on their faces. Near them stands a haggard dwarf, his hands tied behind his back. "Drop your weapons or the dwarf dies!" shouts one of the bandits. His voice is nearly drowned by a deafening peal of thunder.

Any character who suspects a ruse can make a DC 20 Insight check to determine that the dwarf is not, in fact, the bandits' prisoner or a DC 19 Perception check to spot the short sword hidden on the dwarf's person.

Peals of thunder make it impossible for the bandits beneath the tower to discern cries of alarm from the bandits stationed here. No reinforcements are forthcoming.

Tactics

Sorik Orvash stays out of harm's way but recognizes the other dwarf as Tarjin Stoneheart, a fellow stonemason. The bandits threaten to kill their dwarf prisoner unless the heroes throw down their weapons and surrender.

If the characters refuse or attempt to put one over on the bandits, "Tarjin" stomps on the boot of the nearest bandit, causing him to yelp. Then he bolts toward the PCs, taking cover behind their ranks. If a fight breaks out, Celk slips out of his bonds, draws a hidden short sword, and attacks. He tries to take out the party's leader or controller while avoiding defenders and strikers. The doppelganger withdraws into the fog if combat turns against him.

The bandits use the tower walls for cover as they shoot at the PCs. When forced into melee, they draw their maces and attempt to gain combat advantage by flanking.

The zombie rotters appear in two groups of three, arriving on the second and third rounds of combat.

4 Yellowskull Bandits (B)	**Level 2 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 125 each
Initiative +6	**Senses** Perception +1
HP 37; **Bloodied** 18	
AC 16; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12	
Speed 6	
Mace (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+6 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the bandit shifts 1 square.	
Dazing Strike (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Weapon**	
Requires mace or crossbow; +6 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, the target is dazed until the end of the bandit's next turn, and the bandit shifts 1 square.	
Crossbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Ranged 15/30; +6 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the bandit shifts 1 square.	
Combat Advantage	
The bandit deals 1d6 extra damage to any target granting combat advantage to it.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +9, Streetwise +7, Thievery +9	
Str 12 (+2)	**Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 13 (+2)	**Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+2)
Equipment leather armor, mace, crossbow with 10 bolts	

6 Zombie Rotters (Z)	**Level 3 Minion**
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 38 each
Initiative -1	**Senses** Perception +0; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 13; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 9, **Will** 10	
Immune disease, poison	
Speed 4	
Slam (standard; at-will)	
+6 vs. AC; 6 damage.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 6 (-1) **Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 10 (+1)	**Int** 1 (-4) **Cha** 3 (-3)
Equipment chainmail, Fallcrest Guard tabard	

Celk, Yellowskull Doppelganger (C)	Level 3 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid (shapechanger)	XP 150
Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +2	
HP 45; **Bloodied** 22	
AC 17; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 16	
Speed 6	
⊕ **Short Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.	
↓ **Mindwarping Feint** (minor; at-will)	
+6 vs. Will; the doppelganger gains combat advantage against the target until the end of the doppelganger's next turn.	
↓ **Deep Stab** (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Weapon**	
+8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, ongoing 5 damage (save ends), and the target is pushed 2 squares and slowed until the end of Celk's next turn.	
Combat Advantage	
Celk deals 1d6 extra damage to any target granting combat advantage to him.	
Change Shape (minor; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**	
Celk can alter his physical form to take on the appearance of any Medium humanoid, including a unique individual.	
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common	
Skills Bluff +10, Insight +9, Stealth +9	
Str 11 (+1) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+2)	
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 15 (+3)	
Equipment leather armor, short sword	

Features of the Area

Giant Skeleton: East of the tower lies the skeleton of a particularly large hill giant that was killed a generation ago. Three rabbits nest in its skull.

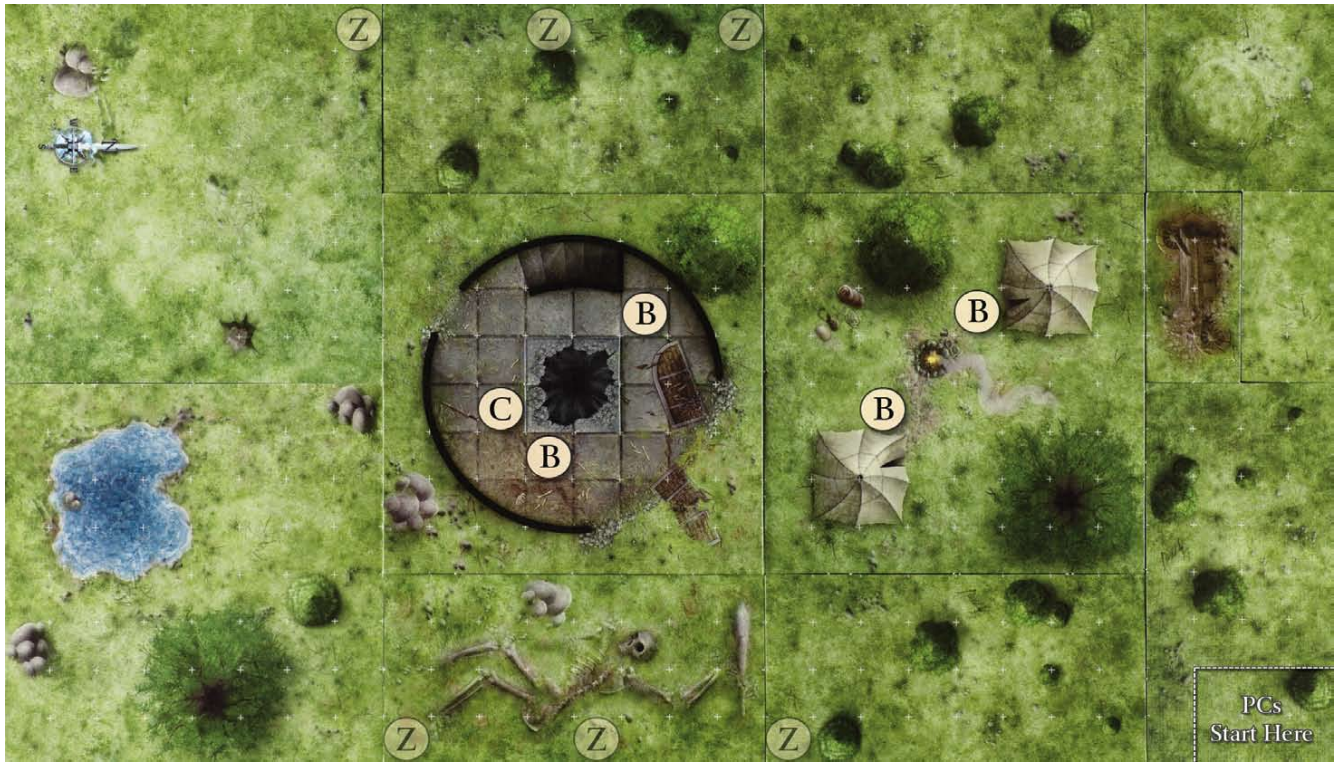
Goldenhawk Crest: A large crest is painted on the southeast wall. Time and weather have caused the crest to fade, but it clearly depicts a two-headed golden hawk against a shield of purple and black. This is the crest of Vanamere and Lethion Goldenhawk, the tower's original owners. The crest holds an important clue to the cauldron in area 4 (see page $XX).

Hole: The brigands have punched a hole through the flagstone floor of the tower, exposing a 5-foot-deep shaft that breaks through the ceiling of a 20-foot-high chamber. Anyone standing within the tower can see flickering light and hear faint voices rising up through the gaping hole. The voices belong to the bandits in area 2. Anyone who falls down lands on the pile of jagged rubble in the middle of the chamber (3d10 damage).

Rope Ladder: A rope ladder with one end tied off to an iron spike in the floor is rolled up next to the hole. The ladder is 50 feet long and descends to the lower chamber.

Ruined Tower: The outer wall of the tower is 20 feet high and slick with rain (DC 20 Athletics check to climb). A large break in the northeast wall is where the tower entrance used to be, and a smaller door-sized gap opens to the southwest. A stone staircase curls upward, stopping short of where the tower's second story used to be. Piled on the staircase are the corpses of four dead bandits.

Tents: The two tents once belonged to Faring-ray's guards. The bandits have already looted them, although six damp bedrolls can be found within the tents.



Development

When the last enemy falls, the PCs have proven their worth to Vanamere's watching spirit. As they prepare to descend the shaft or take a short rest, lightning strikes the top of the tower, breaking away part of the wall and causing a wooden scroll tube to fall to the tower floor.

The scroll tube has a golden stopper at each end, one emblazoned with the symbol of Corellon and the other adorned with the symbol of Kord. The scroll tube contains a scroll with the Hand of Fate ritual (175 gp, 25 gp for the scroll tube).

Celk's Lies: If Celk is defeated but kept alive for questioning, he uses his Bluff skill to spin a web of lies, claiming that he and the brigands are under the spell of a bog hag named Zerilka who lives in the Witchlight Fens, with orders to explore the secret dungeon beneath the tower. Those whom Zerilka hexes wither and die if they defy her. Celk goes on to describe the hag's rivalry with Vanamere, and how the hag only recently learned of the secret dungeon beneath Vanamere's ruined tower. Celk claims that slaying Zerilka is the only way to free him and the cursed brigands from her spell. Of course, none of his story is true, although Zerilka might be real.

Sorik Orvash: If he survives the battle, Sorik remains in the tower while the characters explore the dungeon.

Voices from Below: Characters who listen to the voices from below hear the following exchanges (in Common) with a successful Perception check:

DC 12: "Who built this place anyway?" "Some elf wizard with a lot of money and time on her hands, apparently."

DC 15: "So, why we keepin' the dwarves alive?" "I dunno, maybe Falck thought they'd be more useful alive than undead." "Ain't it obvious, you two? This place is partly collapsed. We might need 'em for diggin'."

DC18: "This place gives me the creeps." "Don't worry. As soon as Falck finds that skull, we're outta here."

"Can he cast spells hanging by his feet from the ladder?"
That's a hit!
This one's destroyed!
Another hit!
"Ladies and Gentlemen, the Jim Darkmagic Magic!"

Encounter 2: The Dungeon

Encounter Level 5 (1,000 XP)

Setup

Tregger, Yellowskull berserker (T)
Lurash, Yellowskull cutthroat (L)
4 Yellowskull bandits (B)
"Chomper," iron snapjaw (C)

The bandits stationed here include Falck's lieutenants, Tregger and Lurash. Six captured dwarf stonemasons (D) are also kept here (see "Development"). The map shows everyone's location, but Lurash is hidden under the scaffolding. Do not place him on the map until he's spotted or until he attacks.

If the characters alert the bandits, Tregger takes up position behind one of the pillars so that he's no longer out in the open. Although they exchange insults, the bandits cannot be coerced into giving up their position or allowing the PCs through without a fight.

When the PCs descend into this room, read:

The hole breaks through the ceiling of a 60-foot-square, dusty room with four large pillars. Directly beneath the hole is a mound of rubble. Two braziers illuminate the area and reveal three exits. A heap of supplies and several piles of skulls are on the chamber floor.

The walls are adorned with half-finished murals depicting great battles. Rickety, 10-foot-high wooden scaffolding clings to the north and south walls, directly below these murals.

Upon the floor and scaffolding stand several leather-clad figures with yellow skulls painted on their faces, as well as a device that looks like rusty iron jaws stained with blood.

The PCs might see the masons. They might also recognize the real Tarjin among the dwarves. All the dwarves have statistics like those of Sorik Orvash.

Tactics

Tregger uses *staggering strike* to push an enemy adjacent to the iron snapjaw he calls "Chomper." He resorts to throwing handaxes only if targets are out of melee reach on a given turn.

Lurash remains hidden until he can attack a PC with 1 round's worth of actions. He poisons his targets so he can keep combat advantage easily. Meanwhile, he tries to stay close to another bandit, so that when he's targeted by a melee or ranged attack, he can use *sly shift* to move out of harm's way.

The bandits shoot their crossbows from atop the rickety scaffolding until forced to engage in melee.

Tregger, Yellowskull Berserker (T) **Level 4 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 175

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +2
HP 66; **Bloodied** 33
AC 15; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 12
Speed 7

⊕ **Maul** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 damage.

↓ **Staggering Strike** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 3d6 + 6 damage, the target is pushed 2 squares, and Tregger shifts adjacent to the target.

↓ **Battle Fury** (while bloodied)
Tregger deals 1d6 extra damage on any hit.

↗ **Handaxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 5/10; +5 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Skills Athletics +9, Endurance +9
Str 17 (+5) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 16 (+5) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+2)
Equipment leather armor, maul, 2 handaxes

Lurash, Yellowskull Cutthroat (L) **Level 4 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 175

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +4
HP 52; **Bloodied** 26
AC 18 (22 against opportunity/immediate attacks); **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14
Speed 6

⊕ **Short Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+9 vs. AC; 1d6 + 6 damage, and Lurash shifts 2 squares.

Poisoned Blade (minor; at-will)
Lurash dips his short sword in a poison-filled scabbard. The next time he hits with his short sword, Lurash makes a secondary attack against the target. *Secondary Attack:* +7 vs. Fortitude; the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage, and is dazed (save ends both). Lurash has enough poison for three attacks.

Sly Shift (immediate interrupt, when targeted by a melee or ranged attack; recharges when first bloodied)
Lurash switches places with an ally within 2 squares (each shifts into the other's space) and redirects the attack to that ally.

Combat Advantage
Lurash 's attack deals 2d6 extra damage to any target granting combat advantage to it.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Skills Acrobatics +11, Stealth +13, Thievery +13
Str 8 (+1) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 14 (+4)
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 12 (+3) **Cha** 9 (+1)
Equipment leather armor, short sword, poisoned scabbard

"Chomper," Iron Snapjaw (C) **Level 3 Soldier**
Medium natural animate (blind, construct) XP 150

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +2; tremorsense 3
HP 47; **Bloodied** 23
AC 19; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14
Speed 6

⊕ **Clamping Bite** (standard; at-will)
+8 vs. AC; 1d10 + 4 damage, and the target is grabbed (-2 to escape) and takes ongoing 10 damage while grabbed. While grabbing an enemy, the iron snapjaw cannot make attacks.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 18 (+5) **Dex** 16 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 15 (+3) **Int** 1 (-4) **Cha** 1 (-4)

4 Yellowskull Bandits (B)	Level 2 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 125 each
Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +1	
HP 37; **Bloodied** 18	
AC 16; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12	
Speed 6	
Mace (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+6 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the bandit shifts 1 square.	
Dazing Strike (standard; $recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Weapon**	
Requires mace or crossbow; +6 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, the target is dazed until the end of the bandit's next turn, and the bandit shifts 1 square.	
Crossbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Ranged 15/30; +6 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the bandit shifts 1 square.	
Combat Advantage	
The bandit deals 1d6 extra damage to any target granting combat advantage to it.	
Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common	
Skills Stealth +9, Streetwise +7, Thievery +9	
Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+1)	
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+2)	
Equipment leather armor, mace, crossbow with 10 bolts	

Development

Dwarf Survivors: If the PCs dispatch all but one of their enemies, the emboldened dwarf stonemasons surge forth to help them overcome their final adversary. If one or more stonemasons are returned safely to Fallcrest, they make arrangements to head back to Hammerfast, their stronghold in the Dawnforge Mountains. Within a couple weeks, a small delegation of Hammerfast dwarves arrives in Fallcrest bearing two treasure parcels for the characters.

Minor Quest: Before he joined the Yellowskulls, Lurash murdered a merchant in Winterhaven. A PC might recognize Lurash as a wanted man with a successful DC 15 Streetwise check. If the characters capture him alive and haul him back to Fallcrest, the Lord Warden offers to release Lurash into their custody so that they can collect a bounty worth one treasure parcel. Payment requires that Lurash be delivered to Winterhaven alive. If the characters succeed in delivering Lurash to the Winterhaven town guard, they gain 150 XP.

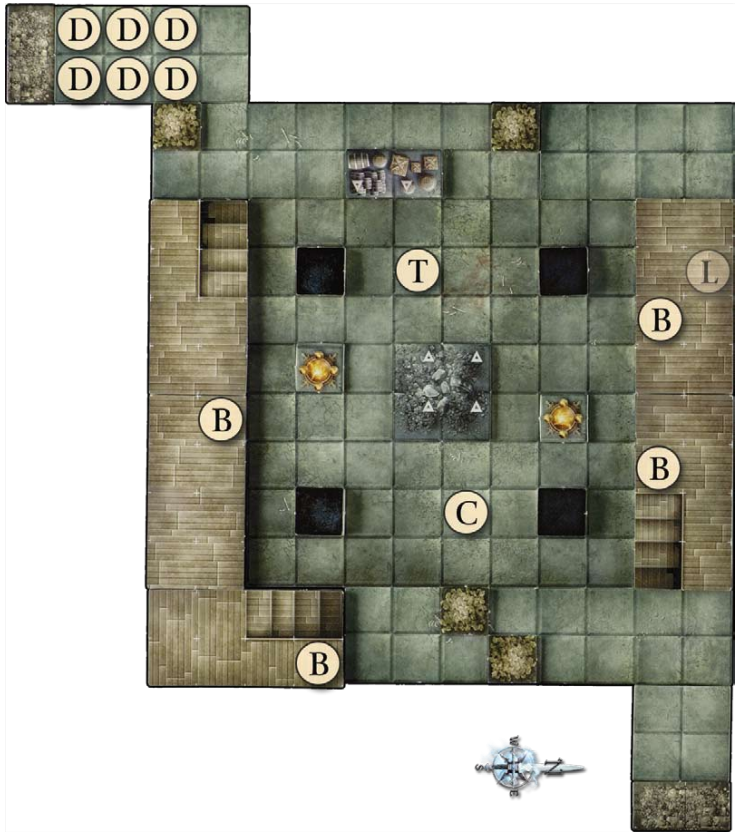
Features of the Area

Exits: The double doors in the northwest corner of the room hang open and lead to area 3. The corridors to the southwest and northeast have collapsed (but can be used to expand the complex if you wish).

Murals and Scaffolding: Vanamere and Lethion intended to cover the walls of this room with murals chronicling their exploits as adventurers. The 10-foot-high scaffolds (DC 5 Athletics check to climb) have barely withstood the passage of time. Each square of scaffolding has 10 hit points; reducing a section of scaffolding to 0 hit points causes it to collapse. Any creature atop or underneath the collapsed scaffolding must succeed on a saving throw or take 1d10 damage and be knocked prone. The area becomes difficult terrain.

Fire: If the area of a fire attack, such as from the braziers, contains scaffolding, the dry wood quickly catches fire. Each round thereafter, 1 additional square of scaffolding catches fire. A creature that enters or starts its turn in such a square takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends), as does the scaffolding.

Fiery Braziers: These brass braziers contain burning oil. Knocking over a brazier fills a close blast 2 area with flaming oil: +4 vs. Reflex; ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).



Rubble: This pile comes from the hole in the ceiling. It is difficult terrain.

Skull Piles: These piles contain bleached goblin skulls. Each pile is difficult terrain.

Supplies: This pile near the western wall includes water, ale, and foodstuffs taken from the dwarf stonemasons and the Fallcrest guards. These squares are difficult terrain.

Encounter 3: Trapped Hall

Encounter Level 4 (900 XP)

Setup

2 Yellowskull bandits (B)
4 flamejet statues
2 iron maidens-in-chains (T, pressure plates)

When they heard sounds of battle from area 2, the Yellowskulls here took cover behind the double doors east of the flamejet traps (eastern doors) and readied actions to shoot at the first enemy that moves into view. Don't place them until the PCs see them.

When the PCs reach the first corner, read:

Around the next corner you see four alcoves. Statues of angels occupy the alcoves on the right; statues of demons fill the alcoves on the left. All four statues breathe continuous gouts of flame. Beyond these jets of fire, you see an open set of double doors.

Perception DC 21: *Two human figures are crouched behind the double doors.*

When the PCs pass the eastern doors, read:

Beyond the double doors, you see more alcoves, each one containing an upright sarcophagus. The lids of these sarcophagi bear the graven images of elf and human warriors.

Tactics

If one or more intruders advance past the flamejet traps, the bolters withdraw to the end of the hall, avoiding the iron maiden trigger plates in the floor.

2 Yellowskull Bandits (B) **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 125 each

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +1
HP 37; **Bloodied** 18
AC 16; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12
Speed 6

Mace (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+6 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the bandit shifts 1 square.

Dazing Strike (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires mace or crossbow; +6 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, the target is dazed until the end of the bandit's next turn, and the bandit shifts 1 square.

Crossbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +6 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the bandit shifts 1 square.

Combat Advantage
The bandit deals 1d6 extra damage to any target granting combat advantage to it.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +9, Streetwise +7, Thievery +9
Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+2)
Equipment leather armor, mace, crossbow with 10 bolts

4 Flamejet Statues **Level 1 Blaster**
Trap XP 100 each

Flame belches from the mouth of each statue, threatening to burn all who pass.

Trap: Flame fills the 2 squares directly in front of the statue.

Perception
✦ DC 10: The character thinks it might be possible to avoid the flames with a successful Acrobatics check.
✦ DC 15: The character sees a way to disable a statue (see Countermeasures, below).

Trigger
The trap attacks any creature that enters a fiery square.

Attack
Free Action **Close** burst special
Target: The triggering creature
Attack: +4 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).
Miss: 1d6 fire damage.

Countermeasures
✦ Thievery (DC 20); standard action; an adjacent character can disable a statue until the end of his or her next turn.
✦ Acrobatics (DC 20); part of a move action; the character can move into a flaming square without being attacked by the trap.

2 Iron Maidens-in-Chains **Level 2 Obstacle**
Trap XP 125 each

Stepping on a hidden pressure plate causes the iron sarcophagus in the nearby alcove to open, revealing a lid lined with spikes. Animated chains lash forth from inside the sarcophagus to pull you in.

Trap: The floor in front of the iron maiden contains a hidden pressure plate. Stepping on it causes the iron maiden to open and attack.

Perception
✦ DC 20: The character spots a hidden pressure plate in the floor.
✦ DC 25: The character realizes that the "sarcophagus" is an iron maiden.

Trigger
The trap attacks any creature that enters the square directly in front of the iron maiden. If a creature is trapped inside the iron maiden already, the trap does not attack.

Attack
Immediate Reaction **Melee** 1
Target: The triggering creature
Attack: +6 vs. Reflex
Hit: A Medium or smaller target is grabbed and pulled into the maiden, taking 1d6 + 4 damage and ongoing 5 damage. Other creatures lose line of sight to the target, and the target loses line of sight to everything outside the iron maiden. A Large or bigger target is grabbed (DC 15 Acrobatics or Athletics check to escape).

Countermeasures
✦ Thievery (DC 18); standard action; an adjacent character can disable a pressure plate.
✦ Athletics (DC 18); standard action; an adjacent character can force open the iron maiden, freeing the creature within and ending the ongoing damage. A creature caught in an iron maiden can open it from within, but the DC is 20. A freed creature appears in the iron maiden's square.
✦ A character outside the iron maiden can attack it (AC 15, Fortitude 15, Reflex 2; hp 50). Destroying the iron maiden frees the creature within, ending the ongoing damage. The freed creature appears in the iron maiden's square.

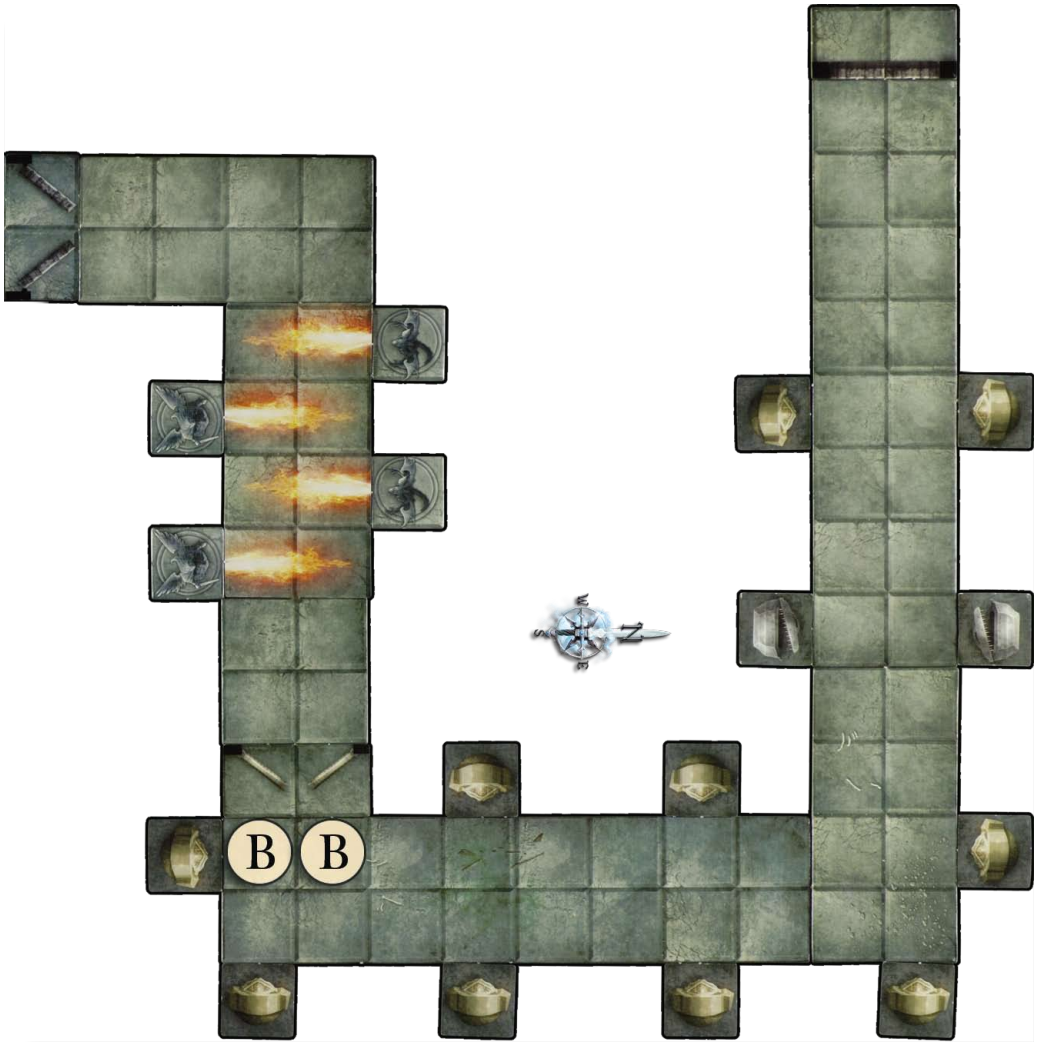
Development

The Rings: If the characters remove one or more of the rings from the warriors sealed in the sarcophagi, they suffer Vanamere's wrath. Until the rings are replaced, the characters take a –2 penalty to all saving throws while they are within the tower. A successful DC 15 Arcana check tells a PC that removing a ring causes eldritch energy to shift within the tower, giving a feeling of being watched by a disapproving observer.

Features of the Area

Flamejet Trap Lever: The lever that shuts off the flamejet traps is hidden behind the doors east of the traps (DC 18 Perception check to locate).

Sarcophagi: The stone sarcophagi (DC 15 Athletics check to open) contain the skeletal remains of elf or human warriors who once defended the tower. Etched into the lid of each sarcophagus is the name of the warrior sealed within, written in Elven or Common. These fallen defenders are buried with their weapons and armor, and each wears a silver ring worth 10 gp. Inscribed on the inside of each ring are the names "Vanamere" and "Lethion" in Common. There are ten rings in all.



Encounter 4: Skull Cauldron

Encounter Level 3 (800 XP)

Setup

2 cauldron corpses (C)

Do not place the monsters on the map until they show up (see "Features of the Area").

When the PCs open the double doors, read:

The centerpiece of this 20-foot-high room is a monstrous stone cauldron nearly 5 feet tall and 10 feet in diameter. Black, fetid tar fills the cauldron to the brim. Surrounding it are seven piles of goblin skulls. Each pile contains skulls painted a specific color.

Four statues depicting elf warriors and human warriors stand atop daises in the corners of the room. Fifteen-foot-high iron doors stand closed to the south.

If cauldron corpses appear, read:

The cauldron belches, and suddenly two blackened corpses rise up out of the tar, their eyes filled with hate.

Features of the Area

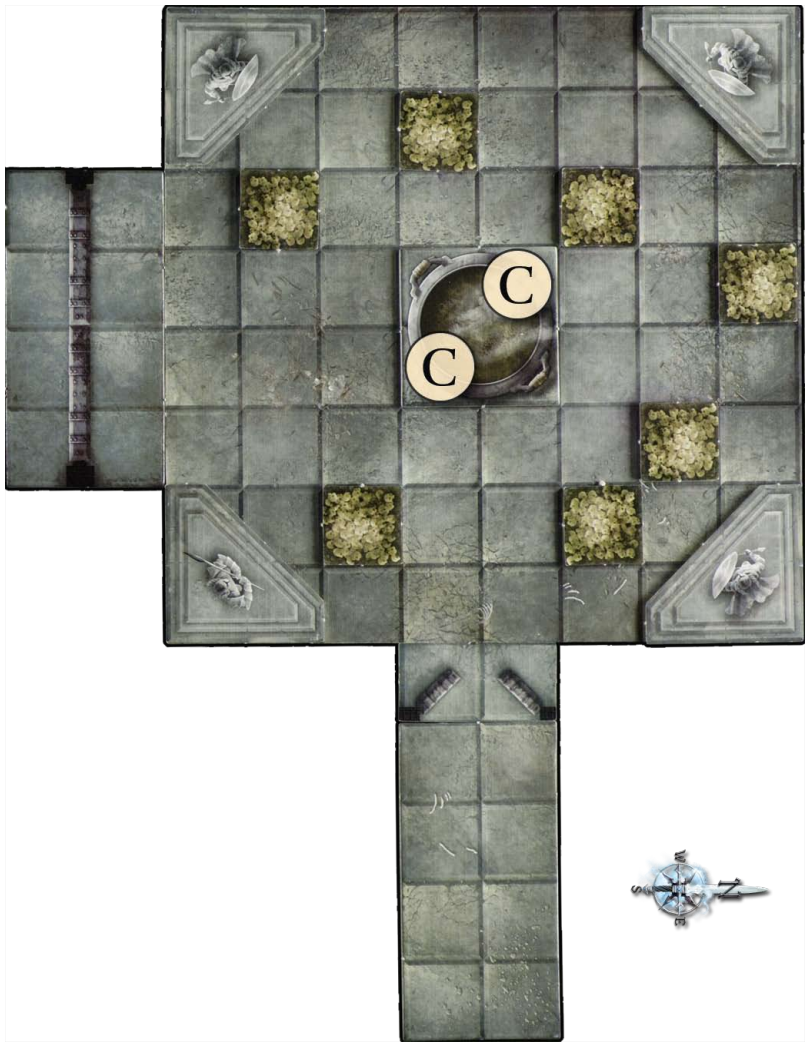
Piles of Goblin Skulls: Each pile contains goblin skulls of a specific color. The number of skulls in each pile varies, with no less than 30 of each color. Beginning with the northernmost pile and moving clockwise, these colors are: black, green, red, gold, purple, white, and blue.

Statues: These 6-foot-tall statues are blocking terrain.

The Cauldron: The cauldron is bolted to the floor and filled with necrotic filth (DC 15 Arcana to identify the danger). Any living creature that touches the tarlike substance takes 1d8 necrotic damage.

Tossing a green, red, white, or blue goblin skull into the cauldron causes two cauldron corpses to rise up from within and attack. Tossing a black skull, a gold skull, and a purple skull into the cauldron (at once or in any order) causes the iron doors to open. The crest of Vanamere and Lethion, as displayed in the ruined tower (see Encounter 1), is comprised of these three colors.

The Iron Doors: These doors cannot be opened by force or with magic. However, they open loudly when three skulls of the appropriate colors are dropped into the cauldron in any sequence (see The Cauldron). The iron doors remain open for 1 round before closing on their own. Attempting to hold an iron door open as it tries to close requires a DC 28 Athletics check.



Tactics

The corpses fight until destroyed. They are not concerned about catching other undead in their necrotic spray.

2 Cauldron Corpses (C)	Level 5 Elite Brute
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 400
Initiative +4	**Senses** Perception +3
HP 152; **Bloodied** 76	
AC 18; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15	
Resist 5 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 4	
Action Points 1	
⊕ **Necrotic Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**	
+8 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).	
⚹ **Necrotic Spew** (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Necrotic**	
Ranged 5; +8 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 3 necrotic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the cauldron corpse's next turn.	
⇦ **Necrotic Spray** (immediate reaction, when hit by an attack; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**	
Close burst 1; +8 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 3 necrotic damage, and the cauldron corpse releases one cauldron mote.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** –
Str 14 (+4)	**Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 16 (+5)	**Int** 6 (+0) **Cha** 4 (-1)

Cauldron Mote	Level 3 Minion Brute
Tiny natural animate (undead)	XP –
Initiative +9	**Senses** Perception +4; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 17; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 14	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic	
Speed 8	
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**	
+8 vs. AC; 3 necrotic damage, and ongoing 2 necrotic damage (save ends). The ongoing damage stacks with that delivered by the cauldron corpse.	
Tomb Tactics	
When a cauldron mote hits a target adjacent to three or more other motes, it deals double damage.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** –

Development

Correct Skull Key: Vanamere and Lethion found the cauldron and hid it here. Only later did Vanamere put its power to use protecting the tomb. If the PCs open the iron doors without causing cauldron corpses to appear, award them experience as if they had slain the cauldron corpses.

I SWEAR AN OATH OF EMNITY ON THE BARBARIAN.
WOW. THAT WAS TOTALLY BANGING.
I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN DO THAT AGAIN. THINK I SPRAINED MY UVULA.

Encounter 5: The Vault

Encounter Level 6 (1,452 XP)

Setup

Jeras Falck (F)
2 boneshard mongrels (B)
4 skeleton archers (S)
4 zombie rotters (Z)

Jeras Falck is attempting to bypass wards to reach the treasures within Lethion's sarcophagus. So far, his efforts have failed. This failure has made him very angry. The PCs might not see the archers when combat begins. Describe the skeletons only once they're seen.

When the PCs open the doors to the tomb, read:

The iron doors part loudly, drawing you into a great vault illuminated by stone-rimmed wells of belching fire. At the far end of the vault, broad steps climb 15 feet to a platform supporting two stone sarcophagi and a pair of braziers. Statues of armored warriors stand at the base of the steps, to either side of which is a raised gallery 20 feet above the floor.

Zombie Yellowskull bandits stand silent in the vault, reeking of death. Behind them, at the top of the stairs, a human wearing a golden mask shaped like a skull limps forward, drawing a crimson orb from the folds of his black robe. His voice is hollow and hateful. "This tomb will be yours unless you leave, now."

Tactics

Falck tries to avoid melee. He targets distant enemies with *pain bolt* and *crimson claws*. Each turn, he also uses *command undead* to position allies between him and his enemies. When two or more enemies are bloodied and within the area of effect, Falck employs *overwhelming wounds*. If he drops to 32 or fewer hit points, Falck assumes *wraithform* and tries to escape.

The undead attack the nearest enemies, while the skeleton archers shoot arrows from the galleries.

2 Boneshard Mongrels (B) **Level 5 Brute**
Medium natural animate (undead) XP 200 each
Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +4; darkvision
HP 70; **Bloodied** 35; see also *boneshard burst*
AC 17; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant
Speed 6

Boneshard Bite (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).

Bite and Hurl (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Necrotic**
+9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends), and the target slides 2 squares and is knocked prone.

Boneshard Maul (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Targets a prone creature; +9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 necrotic damage.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 16 (+5) **Dex** 16 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+4)
Con 17 (+5) **Int** 3 (-2) **Cha** 3 (-2)

Jeras Falck (F) **Level 5 Elite Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 400
Initiative +1 **Senses** Perception +2
HP 114; **Bloodied** 57
AC 19; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 18
Saving Throws +2
Speed 4
Action Points 1

Dagger of Pain (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+10 vs. AC; 2d4 + 2 damage, and the target slides 2 squares.

Pain Bolt (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement, Necrotic**
Ranged 20; +8 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target takes -2 to all defenses until the end of Jeras's next turn

Flurry of Pain (standard; at-will)
Jeras makes two basic attacks.

Crimson Claws (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Implement**
Ranged 10; +8 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 damage and the target is immobilized (save ends both). While the claws immobilize the target, Jeras gains regeneration 3.

Overwhelming Wounds (standard; encounter) ✦ **Implement**
Close burst 5; +9 vs. Will; 2d6 + 4 damage, and if the target is bloodied after the damage, that target is dazed until the end of Jeras's next turn.

Command Undead (move; at-will)
Undead allies within 10 squares of Jeras Falck can shift 2 squares as a free action. One destroyed undead minion rises again with 1 hit point and stands as a free action.

Wraithform (standard; encounter)
Jeras Falck becomes insubstantial and gains phasing until the end of his next turn.

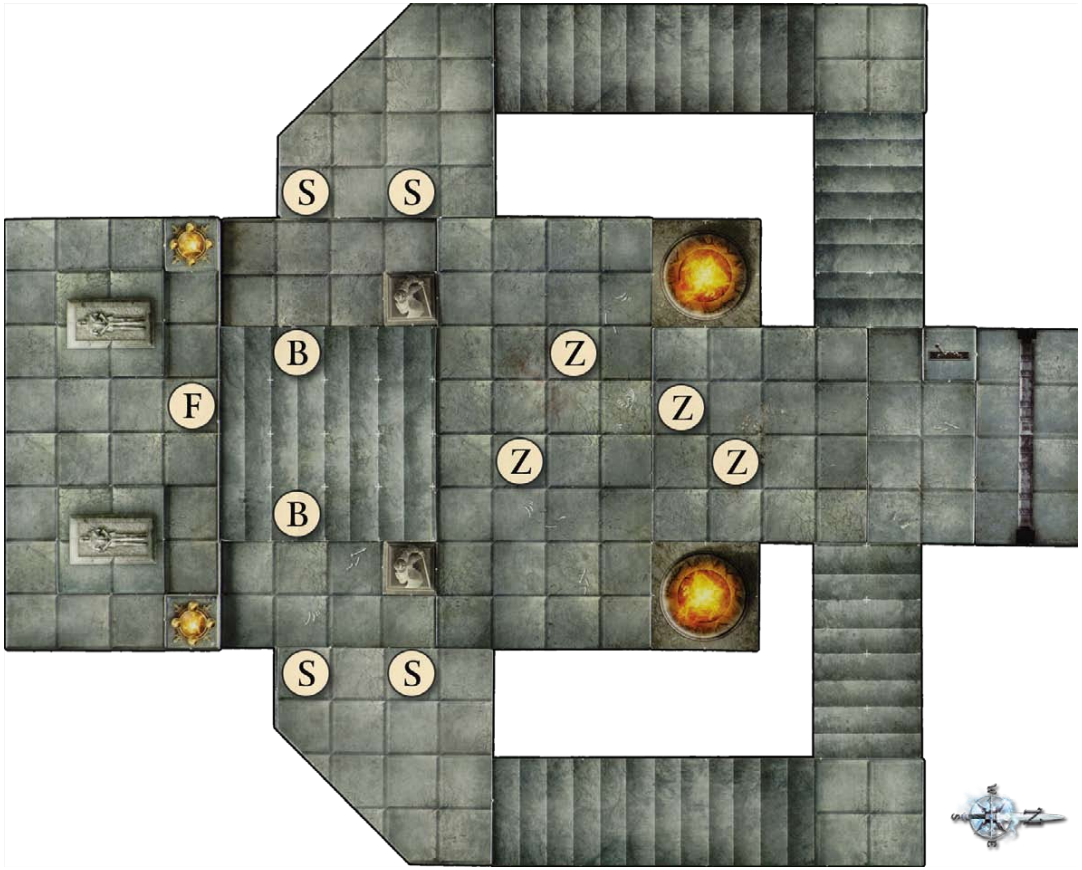
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +9, History +9, Religion +9
Str 12 (+3) **Dex** 9 (+1) **Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 16 (+5) **Cha** 18 (+6)
Equipment robes, dagger, orb, golden skull mask (100 gp)

4 Skeleton Archers (S)	Level 2 Artillery
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 125 each
Initiative +6	**Senses** Perception +3; darkvision
HP 31; **Bloodied** 15	
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 5 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Speed 5	
⊕ **Short Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 2 damage.	
➳ **Longbow** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Ranged 20/40; +6 vs. AC; 1d10 + 4 damage.	
Shake the Mark (immediate reaction, when the skeleton archer is marked; at-will)	
The skeleton archer is no longer marked.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 15 (+3)	**Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 13 (+2)	**Int** 3 (-3) **Cha** 3 (-3)
Equipment short sword, longbow, quiver of 20 arrows	

4 Zombie Rotters (Z)	Level 3 Minion
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 38 each
Initiative -1	**Senses** Perception +0; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 13; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 9, **Will** 10	
Immune disease, poison	
Speed 4	
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)	
+6 vs. AC; 6 damage.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 6 (-1) **Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 10 (+1)	**Int** 1 (-4) **Cha** 3 (-3)
Equipment leather armor	

Features of the Area

Vault Levels: The ceiling in the main hall is 30 feet high. The platform upon which the sarcophagi rest is 15 feet above the floor of the main hall and has a ceiling 15 feet high. The western and eastern galleries that overlook the main hall are 20 feet above the main hall's floor and have 10-foot-high ceilings.



Stairs: The stairs up to the galleries and to the platform are not steep.

Iron Lever: A few feet inside the vault, a heavy iron lever juts out of the floor. Pulling on this lever opens the iron doors, which remain open for 1 round before closing on their own. Attempting to hold an iron door open as it tries to close requires a DC 28 Athletics check.

Wells of Fire: These stone wells are 20 feet deep (DC 20 Athletics to climb) and filled with fire that spews from volcanic vents below the tomb. Any creature pushed into a well takes 1d10 fire damage, in addition to the fall. Any creature starting its turn in a well takes 1d10 fire damage.

Fiery Braziers: These brass braziers contain burning oil. Knocking over a brazier fills a close blast 2 area with flaming oil: +4 vs. Reflex; ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Statues: The two 6-foot-tall statues are blocking terrain.

Vanamere's Sarcophagus: This sarcophagus has a lid carved in the likeness of a female elf wizard wearing a robe and clutching a staff. Carved into the staff is the following, in Elven:

ᔑᓂᐯᓚᔑ ᓀᐣ ᔑᓂᐯᓄ ᓂᓃᔨ ᒐᔨ ᔑᓂᔕᐯᔭᔨ

The runes translate as follows: "Master of magic and fey majesty." The phrase refers to the god Corellon. The lid is askew, exposing the empty interior.

Lethion's Sarcophagus: The lid of this sarcophagus is carved in the likeness of a male human fighter clad in plate armor and clutching a greatsword. The lid refuses to budge, and the sarcophagus seems impervious to harm. The following Elven script is carved into the blade of the stone sword:

ᑲᓇᔑᐣ ᓀᐣ ᔑᓂᐢᐢᑭᐯ ᓂᓃᔨ ᐋᔑᓂᐣ ᔑᓀ ᑲᐢᓇᔑᓂᔕᐯ

The Elven letters translate as follows: "Lord of battle and king of storms." This phrase refers not to Lethion but to the god he worshiped: Kord. When a holy symbol of Kord touches the sarcophagus, or when a prayer to Kord is uttered while touching the sarcophagus, the magical seal is broken, and the lid can be pushed aside with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Within the sarcophagus are three treasure parcels and a gold-plated human skull (see "Development").

Development

Gold Skull: The gold-plated skull in Lethion's sarcophagus contains the bound essence of a powerful demon. Evil forces based in the Temple of Yellow Skulls are after this and other skulls lost over time. Any character who holds the skull can sense the evil trapped within it. However, evil creatures within 20 squares can hear it calling out to them for release.

Finishing With Falck: If Falck escapes and returns to the temple empty-handed, his superiors give him one chance to redeem himself. Within a week, the necromancer hires a mercenary gang and attempts to recover the skull. The villains begin their search in Fallcrest, and this time, Falck fights to the death.

If he is captured and successfully intimidated, Falck might be persuaded to reveal what he knows about the Temple of Yellow Skulls. However, before he can divulge anything, he bursts into flame, lets out a horrifying scream, and turns to ash.

Conclusion

The defeat of the Yellowskull bandits brings an end to the rain. Sunlight breaks through the gray clouds as the characters prepare to depart. Vanamere is at rest once more, and the characters are free to return to Fallcrest and claim their reward.

About the Author

Chris Perkins is the D&D Creative Manager at Wizards of the Coast LLC, and this is his first contribution to *Dungeon*® *Magazine* since "The Lich Queen's Beloved" in Issue #100. He would like to dedicate this adventure to Mike, Jerry, Scott, and Wil.

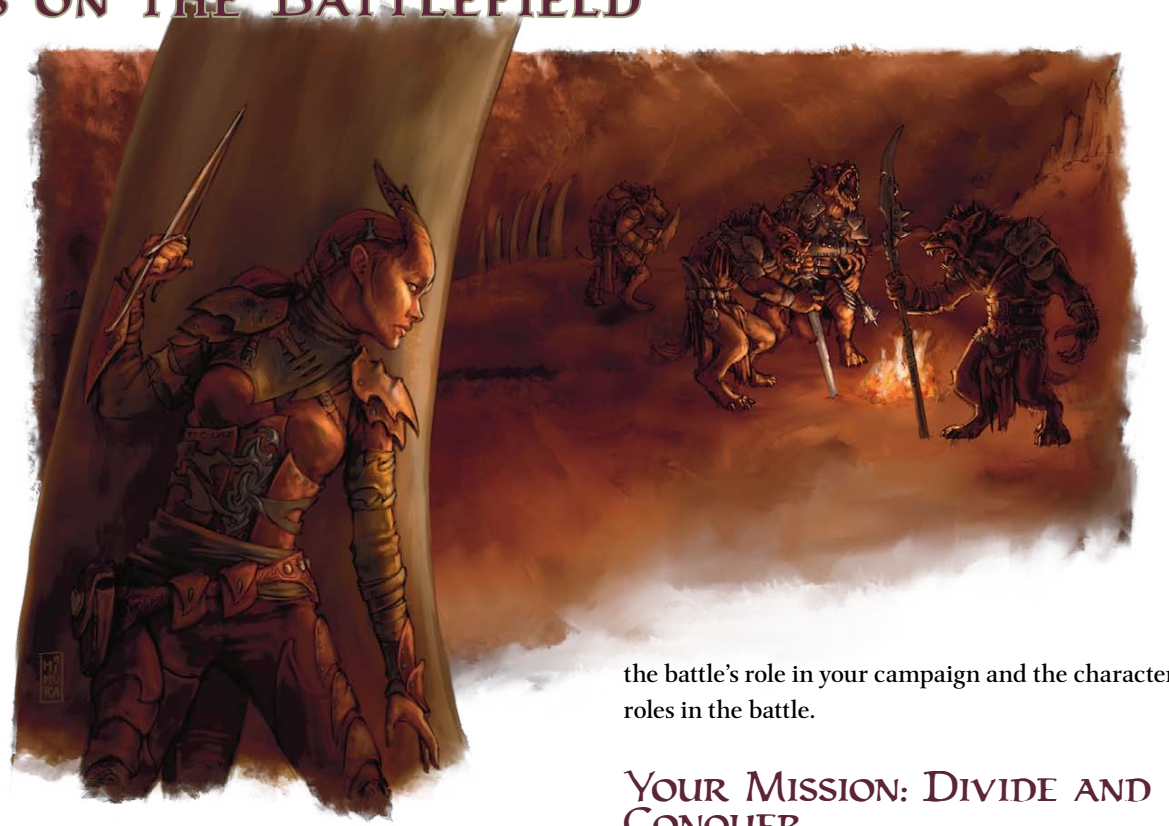
Dungeons & Dragons
Acquisitions Incorporated
You are momentarily startled by a cloud of white doves flying up over the fields.
"You don't know how many times I've seen these doves."

Life During Wartime:

Skill Challenges on the Battlefield

BY MIKE MEARLS

Illustration by Andrew Hou and Raven Mimura



It's hard to believe that this is already the seventh installment in the Ruling Skill Challenges series. It's been a lot of fun so far, and I hope that each month this article sheds some light on skill challenges. The last two installments talked about social skill challenges and gave a sample challenge. This month, it's time to cover a topic near and dear to many a *D&D*® characters' heart: Warfare!

Huge battles have long been a component of fantasy fiction and gaming. The rules for *D&D* evolved from the *Chainmail* miniatures game. *Swords & Spells* performed a neat little trick and arose as the miniatures game designed to support the RPG that evolved from a miniatures game. Later, basic *D&D* added an abstract set of rules called the war machine in the *Companion Set*, while *AD&D*® boasted the *BattleSystem* game for both its 1st and 2nd editions. Finally, in 2001 came another game under the *Chainmail* name, which gave way to the *D&D*® *Miniatures* game.

Almost all of these rule sets struggled with one, important question: How do you drag a PC into the battle? After all, *D&D* is a game about individual adventurers. What effect does a 15th-level wizard have on battle? A 6th-level warden can chop through 1st-level goblin minions all day, but what happens when she leads 50 members of the local militia against 300 goblins?

The skill challenge mechanic is a good match for running the clash of armies, but on its own, it leaves huge swaths of information for the DM to fill in. What does the challenge represent? What's the cost of failure and the reward for victory? What exactly does each skill check cover during a big battle? Answering those questions is key to creating a skill challenge, but those answers might vary based on the battle's role in your campaign and the characters' roles in the battle.

Your Mission: Divide and Conquer

The PCs' place in the battle is the most important aspect to consider in building the skill challenge. Taking command of an entire army is a much different experience from organizing the defense of a castle's gate. When you think of the battle, what is each PC doing?

Battles mean action, and there's no better way to cultivate that than by finding a specific mission

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or task for each PC. After all, it makes sense for the rogue to sneak behind enemy lines, the wizard to conduct a ritual needed to stop the enemy from summoning demons, and the fighter to lead an attack on a critical bridge.

Rather than creating one big skill challenge, instead create individual challenges for each PC to represent a specific task during the battle. These skill challenges should be complexity 1 or 2 at most. They represent the specific missions assigned to each PC. Here are a few types of missions along with their key skills:

✦ **Raids and Espionage (Acrobatics, Bluff, Stealth, Thievery):** Sneak behind enemy lines to assassinate a key enemy commander, steal the enemy plans, sabotage enemy siege engines.

✦ **Leadership (Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate):** Rally fleeing troops, convince an enemy commander to turn traitor, keep disgruntled mercenaries and allies in the fight, convince a skittish commander to attack.

✦ **Strategy and Tactics (Dungeoneering, History, Nature, Streetwise):** Determine the enemy's plan of attack, create a cunning strategy, determine the best terrain for the fight, uncover an overlooked advantage or weakness in defenses.

✦ **Magic Warfare (Arcana, Nature, Religion):** Conduct rituals to hinder and harass the enemy, break their control over magical creatures, summon angels and other allies, or spy on enemy movements.

✦ **Sentinel Duty (Insight, Perception):** Ferret out a traitor in the ranks, watch for the enemy's surprise attack, spot enemy movements and deduce their plans.

✦ **Warfighting (Athletics, Endurance, Heal):** Lead a charge against the enemy lines, take and hold a key bridge, defend the walls against attackers.

Create missions to give each PC something to do, with an eye toward their abilities, character traits, and desires. Best of all, you can mix and match combat encounters with skill challenges. For a fight, simply determine how many PCs are involved and create an encounter using an XP budget for only one character. Add minions to the fight to represent the character's underlings and the units of enemy warriors. See the Combat and Skill Challenges sidebar for more ideas and guidelines.

If two characters have similar abilities, you can assign them to the same mission and increase its complexity by one, or give them similar but separate missions. The fighter might lead an attack on the west gate while the paladin organizes the warriors tasked with blunting the advance of a hill giant tribe.

COMBAT AND SKILL CHALLENGES

Sometimes, it's best to represent a big battle with the standard combat rules. If you see all the PCs fighting shoulder to shoulder against the enemy, you have a combat encounter. You might have combat encounters before or after a skill challenge as part of a big battle, but don't try to force the PCs into a challenge when a standard combat is what you're after.

To handle large numbers of combatants, throw lots of minions into the fray. The PCs might even command a unit of minions. The enemy also has minions with an equal XP value, but don't award the PCs any XP for taking them down. Encourage the PCs to focus on enemy commanders and champions, summoned monsters, and other powerful foes who play similar roles as the PC's on the enemy side.

Let the PCs control their allies or use simple die rolls to determine their actions. A skill challenge to convince soldiers to stand and fight is a good way to make a fight feel like part of a larger battle. The fifth column in this series gave an example of a social skill challenge as part of a fight. Use that example as a model for how to meld a skill challenge into a combat encounter. There'll also be an example in next month's column.

Resist the urge to run a fight to the very end. A battle as part of a skill challenge might have a time limit and an objective. The fighter might need to defeat all the goblins in a ruined tower before enemy reinforcements arrive in 5 rounds, or the ranger and the scouts under his command must set fire to a bridge in 8 rounds or less. If the paladin fails in the skill challenge to rally the elf archers, the PCs lose that mission even if the paladin singlehandedly kills 20 orc warriors. In the scope of the battle, 20 slain orcs won't tip the balance. Instead, the 200 archers who were needed to stand their ground and fire on the advancing hill giants—but who broke and ran because the PCs were fighting orcs instead of steadying the archers—might well turn the battle against the PCs' side. Such changes in fortune drive home the idea that the PCs can kill lots of enemy soldiers but still lose the battle if critical objectives aren't attained. The battle is much larger than the PCs' skirmish.

Once the final round passes or the challenge embedded in the fight ends, cut to a narration describing how the PCs failed or succeeded.

When building missions, use the advice given in the earlier installments of this series. Pay particular attention when mapping skills to each challenge to ensure that the PC who takes on a task has suitable abilities to complete it. However, you can feel free to up the DCs. Upping the DC increases the tension without turning the challenge into an exercise in pure die rolling.

Tying the Missions Together

While this model places the PCs into different skill challenges, each challenge should have an effect on the others. This approach might seem difficult, but it's actually very easy to implement. Each time a PC gains a success or failure in one mission, grant a benefit or a penalty to some other PC's challenge. The easiest way to do this is to establish an order of events.

Since you are running one skill challenge for each PC, allow each PC an action or skill check, then jump to the next PC and do the same, going from character to character until everyone has had a turn and continuing until every challenge is done. Movies do this all the time, with the action jumping from one character to the next during a grand battle scene. The key is that the order isn't determined randomly by initiative rolls or by the arrangement of players around the table. The order is established by the DM by figuring out which challenges effect others. Ideally, one PC's success or failure has a direct effect on the next PC's action.

As a rule of thumb, it's best to progress from large actions to small ones, from the strategic to the tactical. Taking the example missions given above, let's say you divide a battle into the following missions. They are given in the order of play around the table.

✦ **Magic Warfare:** The party's invoker chants a ritual along with several other priests to push back clouds of darkness and swarms of flies that follow the undead army.

✦ **Strategy and Tactics:** From his perch at the top of a hill overlooking the battle, the party's warlord issues orders to the army as it fights an advancing horde of undead.

As a rule of thumb, if the PCs fail at more missions than they succeed, their army suffers defeat. If they succeed at more than they fail, they defeat the enemy.

✦ **Leadership:** The paladin commands the army from the frontlines. In the face of a unit of undead, the paladin must keep up the army's courage to prevent it from fleeing.

✦ **Raids and Espionage:** The rogue leads a small group of scouts around enemy lines in hope of destroying the juggernaut of Amon-Thartos, a magical item that the enemy uses to command its undead troops. This sequence allows for some obvious ties between each challenge. If the invoker's ritual pushes back the darkness, the warlord has a better view of the field and can dispatch reinforcements and counter the enemy's moves. At the front lines, fresh reinforcements boost morale and push back the enemy's advance. As the army hacks through the undead, sentinels set to watch the *juggernaut* rush to the front, clearing the raiding party's path. By the same token, failure at each step complicates the next one.

As a rule of thumb, success should grant the next PC a +2 to +4 bonus on a skill check, failure a -2 to -4 penalty. If you're using higher than normal DCs, go with the lower modifiers. For standard DCs, use the higher modifier.

Why Use Many Small Challenges?

Many DMs try to use high complexity challenges to represent big, important events. That's an understandable impulse, but it can create a situation where each PC is stuck in the same role round after round. The rogue makes Stealth checks, the fighter uses Athletics, and the warlock assists the rogue.

By breaking a challenge down into smaller components, you allow for a wider variety of skills and give each PC a chance to shine. Best of all, it gives you an excuse to split up the party and draw a truly epic scene, one that spans an entire, massive battlefield. Each character sees only one corner of the conflict, but taken as a whole, you can weave a vast panorama worthy of a battle to determine the fate of a town or even an entire empire.

Together We Stand ... or Fall

For each mission, devise a final bonus or penalty for success or failure. When a challenge ends, it should have a huge impact on the rest of the battle. In addition, determine the battle's end result based on the number of missions the PCs complete and the number they fail. More importantly, you need to consider what happens on a narrative level with each challenge.

In the example above, destroying the *juggernaut* causes the skeletons and wights that make up much of the enemy army to turn to dust or run amok. The fighting becomes easier, but the PCs must still defeat the enemy: The invoker gains a bonus on her skill checks for the rest of her skill challenge, while the paladin can re-roll his next failure.

Your best bet for finding specific mechanics lies in sample skill challenges from this series along with skill challenges from adventures. Use benefits granted by secondary skills as guidelines.

Finally, you should determine the measure you use to see whether the PCs achieve an overall victory or suffer defeat. As a rule of thumb, if the PCs fail at more missions than they succeed, their army suffers defeat. If they succeed at more than they fail, they defeat the enemy. If they tie, the battle is a draw. If the PCs have enough successful missions to win, the battle ends even if they have a mission or two unresolved. With the outcome determined, there's no reason to force the players to keep rolling dice.

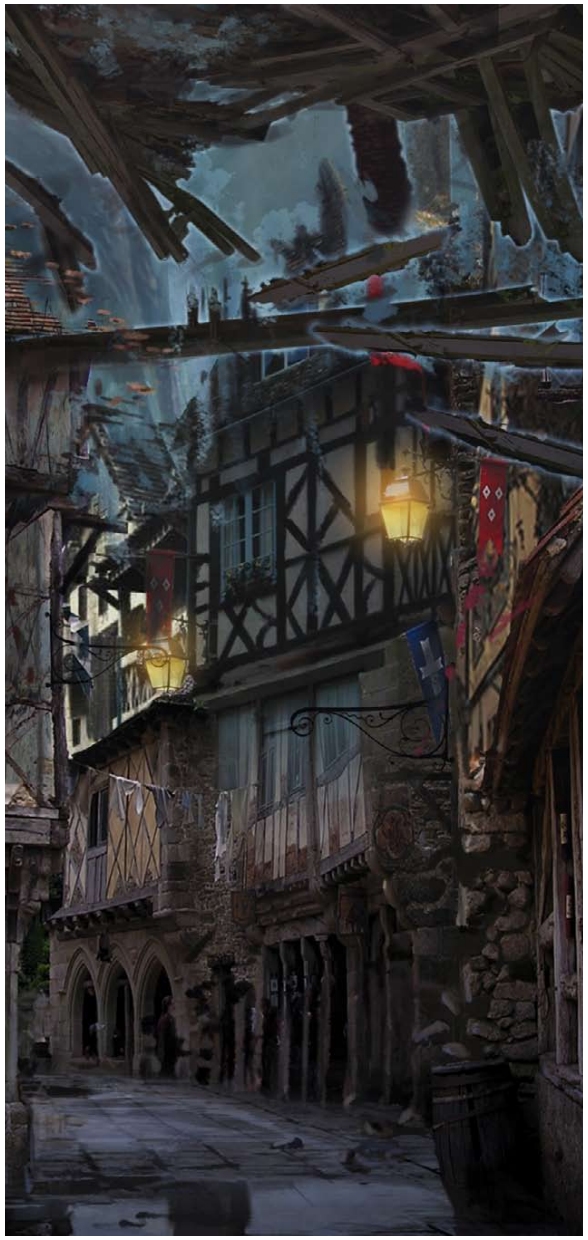
Next month, I'll present a sample skill challenge that represents a battle. It will use the basic structure presented here and give specific examples for each mission. See you then!

About the Author

Mike Mearls is the Lead Developer for the Dungeons & Dragons® roleplaying game. His recent credits include H1: *Keep on the Shadowfell*™ and *Player's Handbook® II 2*.

It's All About Decisions

BY STEPHEN RADNEY-MACFARLAND
illustration by Rob Alexander



For the past couple of months, I've talked about the flow and tangle of information in your D&D game. I've discussed not only how to get those important bits of information out of your head and into your players' but how to keep them straight during adventure planning and play. Up until now, I've treated information as its own reward. Not only can it be used as a different sort of treasure—bits of crucial information that can save characters from a jam as effectively as any well-timed use of a power jewel—but also as the roots of your own storytelling. But this is only half of it. Rather than being an end, these threads are just a means for something more important. It's all about decisions; both their creation and their manipulation.

It's a Maze, I Tell You

The Dungeons & Dragons® game, no matter what the edition, is an absolute maze of decisions. You make decisions when you make your character, when you level your character, and when you play the character, to name but a few. Much of the game's design and development involves creating interesting and worthwhile choices for the various decision points during character creation and advancement. While chance and rolling dice are fun and provide excitement to the resolution of important actions in the game, the most satisfying part of the *D&D*® game for many people is the decision-making process and the unveiling of the consequences of those decisions. This is most true in the decisions that take place during actual play.

Should we take the left passage, the right, or try that secret door we found? Should we cut through the forest teaming with bandits or take the long way around even though there are rumors of a young red dragon hunting the southern road? Should we seek an audience with the sultan or trust that shifty vizier who hired us? When you're the DM, these questions are the real bread and butter of players' interaction with your storyline. While in *D&D* there is always the assumption that no matter what road the characters take, an action-packed fight or crafty skill challenge will result, players enjoy making decisions for their characters, and they enjoy *having those decisions matter*. What's more, they enjoy brainstorming and arguing about alternatives with the other players in the group. In fact, the seemingly endless horizon of

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possibility is something that sets *D&D* apart from the many computer-games on the market.

Under the Hood

As I have warned in early columns, one of the biggest challenges to your DMing sanity is trying to plan for all of these contingences and potential decisions. Nothing contributes to the onset of both adventure design paralysis and overdesign like trying to plan for every contingency. This is where those nuggets of important information come in handy.

Nothing contributes to the onset of both adventure design paralysis and overdesign like trying to plan for every contingency.

Whenever you attach a roll to information, you should be either providing a decision to a player or guiding a preferred course of action, sometimes both. Let's go back to the example I put forward two columns ago, titled Narrative Threads where the characters, while tracking down a group of norker bandits who raided a caravan, spot a rider in the distance.

From this vantage point, you see a dusty canyon almost a quarter of a mile across. The norker tracks lead down a steep and treacherous path on your side of the gulch, travel across it, and then seem to climb a slope to a craggy rise on the canyon's far side. A cave pierces the canyon wall at the top of that rise. All is calm except for a dust cloud to the north, kicked up by a rider speeding toward the rise.

DC 10: The rider is humanoid, tall, and muscular, wearing ornate red armor. His helmet makes it hard to see his race. His mount seems to be a large, tiger-like beast.

DC 15: Comfortable in the saddle, the rider holds himself with a warrior's bearing. The cat beneath him moves with power and grace, and you make out that it has large, saberlike canines. The rider's ornate armor and saddle are adorned with strange symbols of a foreign style, portraying a repetition of skulls and snake patterns.

DC 20: For an instant, the rider turns his head to look behind him, allowing a brief look at his face. He's a hobgoblin.

In "Narrative Threads," I treated this read-aloud text and skill checks entirely as ways for you to pass information in a quick and unfolding way to your characters. This time we are going to look under the hood at the ulterior motive for providing this information.

At this point, the characters have already faced a number of choices at the ruined caravan where they discovered the norker tracks. There was more there than just clues of norkers, but the characters chose to follow the norker tracks. Those tracks lead to a warren filled with norkers. If the characters wanted to, they could just wade through the horde, punishing the savage creatures for their raid and getting rid of a threat, but I wanted to focus the PCs' delve into the norker warrens. By presenting the hobgoblin, I sowed the seeds that there was something more going on here than just mindless carnage against a caravan; that there was more to the story.

As the characters fight through the seemingly endless, mazelike, norker warrens, they keep searching for clues of the hobgoblin's progress because they want to see what part he has to play. They look for his booted footprints among the barefoot tracks of norkers. They look for equipment or idols that have the same artistic motif as the rider's foreign attire. The scene created both a mystery and enough tangibles to latch onto toward following that mystery. Players love figuring out a mystery.

Because I added this focus, I could also make the norker warrens large, sometimes repetitive, and interspersed with encounters that were downright overwhelmingly deadly (ouch, wrong turn!)—with enough warning to give the players an idea of what they are about to get into, of course. In short, I could make the area seem like a hive of vicious creatures rather than a balanced *game environment*, because I'd given a focus to the characters' delving. Characters could follow those overly dangerous paths, but they would not lead to the results the players wanted. These are the best kinds of walls. They allow the characters to choose rather than dictating a decision or giving them inexplicable dead ends (remember

Players love figuring out a mystery.

the tavern story ... that crazy back door that wasn't a door?). I can give real choices but still have a good idea which option players will choose by making one choice more intriguing—by implying a better story reward for turning right instead of left.

Ends Are Just New Beginnings

Some of you may be calling foul. After all, what I am really doing is giving the illusion of choice while creating only one real choice. Bullheaded players may delve deeper and deeper into the endless (and not entirely mapped out) norker warren relishing the XP generator, but eventually those encounters become tedious and boring. It's not a real choice.

You're right, but most players are not that obstinate. Players tend to follow mysteries and look for new and exciting challenges. Still, this is a trick that you should use sparingly. Real choices are infinitely better.

For example, when the PCs finally find that hobgoblin, they'll find an organized group in a hidden base under the norker warrens, where hobgoblin warmages are creating teleportation circles to prepare supply lines for a planned invasion into the Eilthir Vale, the character's home. During that section of the adventure, the PCs will have the opportunity to find new secrets though checks, but more importantly, they'll be faced with a number of new and important decisions. Should they destroy the teleportation circles? Can they use the circle and scout the other side? Should they leave it alone, watch, wait, and hopefully find out more, or find a way to manipulate it themselves? Should they leave and alert the local lord? Of course, knowledge rolls and the examination of local evidence will give hints about the possible outcome for each decision and could possibly nudge them in one direction or the other, but more importantly, I can come up with an adventure plan for each branch of the decision point. This may take more time, and there is a greater chance of wasted design (that is, design that your players never see), but having these kinds of choices strengthens your game. When added to the pseudo-choices described above, your world seems larger and more sandbox-like than it actually is.

Don't let a couple of bad apples ruin the game for you and the rest of your players.

There you have it. It's all about the decisions, real or imagined, that will give your game and your adventure threads resonance. Of course, never let your players realize which are the real choices and which ones are the facades!

On to the mailbag.

Conflicts Beyond the Grid

I recently started a new campaign with a group of friends from school. Our group is mostly comprised of couples, one of which has become troublesome. Individually, the two players are not problematic, but in almost every game we play, these two end up snapping at each other for not helping them in battle or offering advice in frustrating situations. On at least one occasion, these arguments expanded into a shouting match. These moments make me very uncomfortable and make it difficult for me to focus on running the game because I naturally withdraw from such conflict.

Last night, this came to a head when one of the two attacked the other while they were unconscious in battle for an in-game insult. The group responded accordingly and killed the PC for killing another party member, and for a moment, everyone laughed and seemed fine with this.

However, these two players began to gripe at each other at the table for over half an hour before moving to the front porch and practically screaming at each other about the game. The three remaining PCs finished the dungeon and ended the night.

My wife, a first-time gamer, confided in me that the behavior of these two players really bothers her and makes her not want to play anymore. I am afraid that their arguments, tantrums, and pouting fits will drive her and the other players away from D&D entirely. Is there any way for me to salvage my game without ruining friendships and hurting feelings?

—Awkward Silence

I think for this one I'm going to have to rely on a piece of wisdom given to me by my mother when I was a knee-high nerdling: If you're not having fun, it's not worth playing. Sure, games can be frustrating, even aggravating at times. You can be nervous about your choices or have trepidations about the challenges you're facing, but games should never be uncomfortable or a chore, and these are what this couple has made of your game. On top of that, if they've not

noticed this and apologized for it by now, they may be too self-absorbed to care.

You stated they are okay on their own but volatile when mixed. Sit each of them down and put forward your concerns; explain how their fights are making the other players feel uncomfortable. But in the end, be prepared to cut out the cancer. Don't let a couple of bad apples ruin the game for you and the rest of your players. If they really are your friends, they'll understand.

Gen Con or Bust

I'm headed to Gen Con Indy this year for the second time. Last time I went on a road trip with friends. We had a good time, but I feel like I missed out on a lot of stuff. There was tons of stuff going on around me—meeting/interacting with game designers, game sessions, demos, etc. I attended a few RPGA games (and did not judge), bought a few new books, and that was it. This time, I'm likely headed alone, which really isn't phasing me much. I'm stoked -- it might work to my benefit, because I'll have freedom to basically do what I want without the necessity of friendly consent.

Other than actively getting involved with the RPGA, as a Gen Con noob, is there anything you can recommend that I try or attend? Do you happen to know yet if Wizards will be hosting a lot of stuff outside the RPGA this year?

—Noobasaurus

You're right. There's a lot going on at Gen Con and you only encountered the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Back when I was a convention attendee, I always made sure to vary my activities so I could get a sampling of everything that was going on. I really recommend that you play some or even DM some RPGA events, but you have that covered. If you are going with a group, or you find a group of like-minded players at the show, and you want to see what a competitive *D&D* event is like, I would also recommend giving the Dungeons & Dragons Championship a shot. This year's adventure, *Shards of Galifar*, is set in the new 4E-updated *Eberron*® setting, so that's an extra treat.

Other than gaming, Wizards of the Coast hosts an entire seminar track. The must-attend seminar is probably the *D&D* Extravaganza, which is scheduled for both Friday and Saturday at 2 p.m. in the Marriott Indiana Ballroom G. That's where we show you what we have in store for the future, give you behind-the-scenes secrets of *D&D* design and development, and offer unfettered access to the *D&D* RPG staff. But that's not the only seminar event. There are seminars on running high-level *D&D* games, seminars focusing on the Forgotten Realms® and Eberron campaign settings, discussions with Ed Greenwood—and I would be remiss if I didn't mention the Save My Game seminar on Friday at noon, where attending R&D staff will be on hand to give advice.

For full events, those hosted by Wizard of the Coasts and the various other participants, go to www.gencon.com.

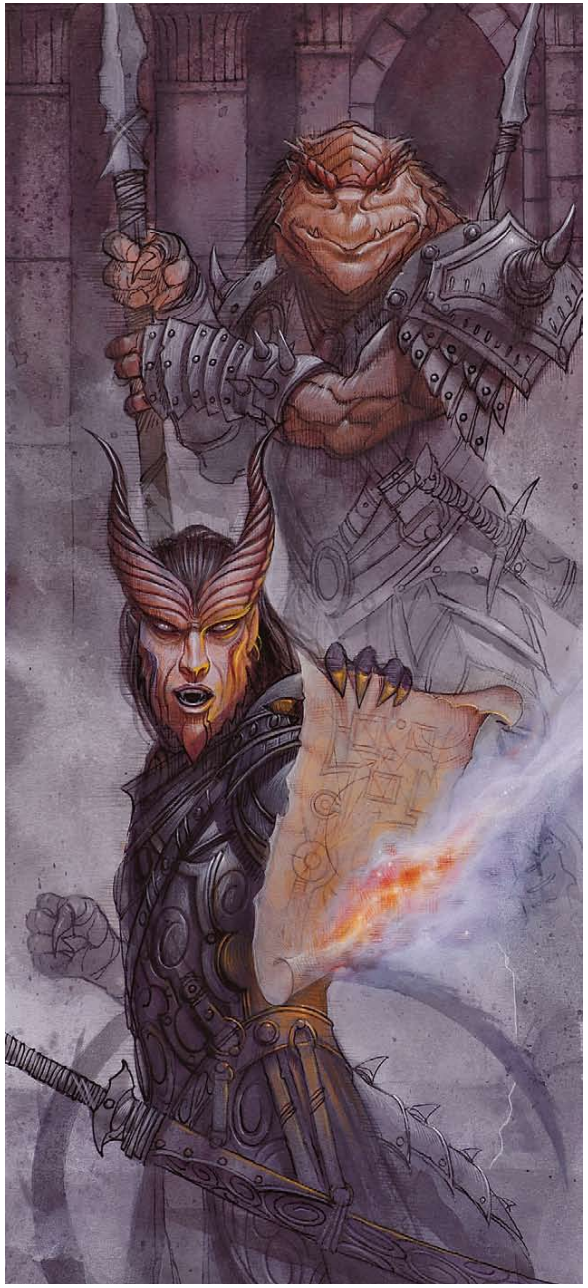
About the Author

Born on a stormy Christmas day, in our nation's capital, during the Nixon administration, **Stephen Radney-MacFarland** proved that the stars were definitely wrong when he came screaming into the world. Spending most of his impressionable years as a vagabond and ne're-do-well, Stephen eventually settled in the Northwest to waste his life on roleplaying games.

Once that RPGA® guy, Stephen is now a developer in RPG R&D where he doesn't create the traps... he just makes them deadlier. He also teaches a class on roleplaying design for the Art Institute of Seattle, molding the minds of young and upcoming designers. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

Episode 14: Choosing Monsters

by James Wyatt
Illustration by Wayne England



How can it be time to write my column again? We've barely played since my last one—in fact, I don't think we've played at all. People seem to keep taking Fridays off, running into deadlines, and other silly excuses like that. Oh, and of course, I'm taking this Friday off. Oops.

Fortunately, even when I'm not actually running my campaign, I spend time thinking about it. The topic for this month's column comes from a discussion that took place in the "development pit" (the walled area of four cubicles where the members of our development team sit) a couple of weeks ago. The heart of the discussion was, how do DMs decide what monsters to use in an adventure? With Monster Manual 2 releasing this week, it seemed like a good time to talk about monsters.

One of the things we tried to do while working on the 4th Edition Monster Manual was to remove reasons for DMs not to use monsters. That's why, for example, there are no good or lawful good monsters in that book—a good alignment is a reason for DMs not to use that monster. (A pretty good reason, I think.) Similarly, we don't specify where monsters live—this monster in tropical rainforests, that one in frozen tundras. We don't want DMs to think, "Oh, this monster looks perfect for my jungle temple adventure . . . except it says here they live in dry hills. Rats."

That said, I think every experienced DM has ways of choosing monsters that feel as if they belong in a particular adventure or setting. Those methods aren't necessarily easy to articulate, but they're there, and the task I've taken on myself for this month is to try to articulate the kinds of things I think about when selecting monsters.

Broad Themes

I have written in previous columns about looking for aberrant monsters for my Greenbrier campaign. I want the intrusion of the Far Realm into the world to be a major theme of that campaign, so I want to use a lot of aberrant monsters. Using just the first *Monster Manual*, I was having some trouble—there aren't that many low-level aberrant monsters in the book. I've used dolgrims and dolgaunts from the *EBERRON Campaign Guide*. *Monster Manual 2* introduces the fell taint, which I have used once so far. Otherwise, I've been using goblins and other natural monsters and warping them, sometimes just describing their appearance as warped and twisted, sometimes actually altering their powers.

What are the big stories of your campaign, and what monsters are involved in those stories? If you have a ready answer to those questions, populating your dungeons will be easier. If your campaign is about the rise of a powerful lich, you might feature a lot of undead. Maybe you're running a campaign that

casts the PCs as itinerant dragonslayers. That would suggest an obvious choice of monsters.

As a broader example, let's look at the article I wrote for *Dragon* 370 featuring the primordial known as Mual-Tar the Thunder Serpent. If you build a campaign around the various cults seeking to free Mual-Tar the Thunder Serpent, you can start with storm-themed monsters such as storm archons, storm giants, blue dragons, and whatever else you can find. The *D&D Compendium*, by the way, is a great way to dig up all those storm-themed monsters—a search for "lightning" turns up 140 monsters. Searching for "thunder" gives me 100 more, and 55 creatures have both!

If you find yourself with a shortage of monsters that fit your broad theme, altering the appearance, origin, and powers of existing monsters can make them fit better. For that Mual-Tar campaign, you might add storm-themed powers to various monsters, as I did in that article. It was a simple matter to tweak the bralani of autumn winds to make it a bralani of autumn storms—I just changed its autumn chill power to a weakening lightning strike and turned its whirlwind blast into a thundering blast. I could have added thunder and lightning resistance, too. For the Sarpacala malison yuan-ti in that article, I made more extensive changes to the malison disciple of Zehir, adding a power (*thunder serpent's wings*) directly reminiscent of Mual-Tar's own *wing storm* power.

In Bill Slavicsek's Ampersand column this month, he previewed the new addition to the DM's Toolbox coming in *Dungeon Master's Guide 2* this fall: monster themes. I alluded to these in Episode 9, when I wrote about crafting Those Who Hear as opponents for my PCs. In essence, they do just what I did when I stole powers from the foulspawn and applied them to low-level monsters. A monster theme is just a collection of powers you can add to a monster in order to make it fit a theme. "Cultist of Mual-Tar" isn't one of the themes in that book, but it could be. As a starting point, you could pick the best thunder- and lightning-themed powers from those couple of hundred monsters in the *Compendium*.

Adventure Themes

The adventure-building advice in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* discusses the "personality" of an adventure setting (page 108) as a way to think about designing and populating it. It's interesting for me to realize, though, that when I was writing it, I took for granted some of what this column is discussing. Of course, the inhabitants of an adventure setting shape its personality. But how do you decide who inhabits it? What does it mean when you casually say the volcano lair is "inhabited by salamanders?" Does that mean every encounter should consist of groups of salamanders? Of course not—encounter after encounter with nothing but salamanders would get old pretty quickly.

But it's still a great organizing principle for an adventure. So let's imagine that I'm populating the volcano dungeon that's infested by salamanders. I start by looking at the salamanders in the *Monster Manual*. They're level 14 and 15, and they come in four different roles—brute and skirmisher at level 14, artillery and controller (leader) at level 15—which gives me a lot of flexibility for building those encounters that are salamander-only. A quick check of *Monster Manual 2* and the *Compendium* tells me we haven't done any more salamanders yet (sounds like an opportunity for a *Creature Incarnations* article). The next place I look is the encounter groups in the *Monster Manual* entry, where I learn that fire archons, redspawn firebelchers, beholder eyes of flame, azer, red dragons, and even chimeras can commonly be encountered with salamanders. What do those monsters have in common? Fire, assuming it's a fire-breathing chimera. And they're all between level 12 and level 17, making them a good fit alongside the salamanders.

That list includes no monsters from *Monster Manual 2*. If I go to the index of monsters by level in the back of that book and look in the range of level 12 to level 17, I quickly spot the flame shard, phoelarch, and fire-breathing gold dragon. That's plenty of monsters for me to build the skeleton of an adventure with.

But I want some variety, too—I don't want every encounter in the adventure to feature monsters that spew fire at the characters. So I start looking for creatures in the same level range that I can imagine living in the heart of a volcano. There are a number of constructs I can see withstanding the heat of the place: eidolon, helmed horror, shield guardian, stone golem. A few interesting villain-type monsters jump out at me as well: the human wizard lich, the mind flayer infiltrator, the drow priest, and a couple of angels. Picking one of those can give me a good hook for the adventure and ideas for how to populate more non-salamander encounters.

Let's say that a group of drow have found their way up from the underdark to this volcano fortress and taken over. Adding drow and related monsters (starting with the demons, grimlocks, spiders, and umber hulks listed in the drow encounter groups in the *Monster Manual*) to the fiery-themed monsters I've already brainstormed gives me a really interesting mix. As the players move from early encounters with salamanders to later encounters that include some of these Underdark monsters, they'll start wondering what's going on. Then the climactic encounters that include drow will open their eyes to the Underdark connection.

Geography

The salamanders' volcano lair is an example of an adventure theme based more or less on geography. What do I do if the characters are delving deep into a fetid swamp or discover an ancient ruin in the midst of a jungle?

Some monster entries in the *Monster Manual* mention the kind of terrain a particular monster favors. Yuan-ti, for example, "inhabit the jungles of the natural world." The hydra "lurks in swamps, bogs, and flooded caverns." Eladrin live in the Feywild and the world's "dark forests." This information appears in a lot of monster entries but not every one. And it's not codified or indexed, so there's no easy way, if you're trying to populate a jungle ruin, to find other monsters that are stated to live in the jungle.

That's where the conversation that inspired this article started. How do I know, especially if I'm new to *D&D* and have never seen a *Monster Manual* with a Climate/Terrain entry, what monsters to put in my jungle dungeon?

Let's say I start with yuan-ti, perhaps because I was inspired by the description of a yuan-ti ruin in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. I'm looking at a similar range of levels as the salamander—the yuan-ti in the *Monster Manual* range from the level 13 malison sharp-eye to the level 12 anathema. Can I use a hill giant? A purple worm? A night hag? A chimera?

The *Monster Manual* states that hill giants "inhabit badlands, deserts, and canyons." Purple worms hunt in "the deep natural caverns of the Underdark." Night hags, like other hags, "haunt the Feywild and the lonely places of the world." Chimeras "survive well in any climate, provided there's abundant food." So should I steer clear of the hill giants and the purple worm?

I don't think so. The fact that hill giants seem to prefer dry climates shouldn't preclude them appearing in the jungle. I also have no trouble imagining that the yuan-ti who inhabit these jungle ruins might have brought hill giants to serve them as slaves in their palaces in ancient times. As for the purple worm ... well, maybe prey is scarce deep below these ruins, so the worm has to hunt the surface. Or perhaps there's a deep dungeon beneath the ruins that meets Underdark tunnels far underground.

In short, I'm happy to pick a single monster that seems particularly at home in the unique geographical setting of my dungeon, then pick other monsters that fit, regardless of how hard I must work to justify their inclusion in my adventure. Once I've chosen yuan-ti, I can use the encounter groups in that entry to find more monsters, as well as flipping through my books (and the *Compendium*) for more snaky and reptilian monsters.

What if I want to use yuan-ti in my adventure, but it's not set in the jungle? Once again, I can ignore the *Monster Manual* text for my purposes. I can imagine yuan-ti in bramble-choked lower reaches of Greenbrier Chasm, for example, even though its climate is temperate.

Alternatively, I can change the climate and terrain of part of my dungeon. What if the characters in my campaign delve deep into Greenbrier Chasm and break into a lush cavern choked with ferns and vines, clouded with steamy mist, and crawling with tropical snakes and yuan-ti? Another part of the chasm could be layered with ice and frost and inhabited by frost giants, winter wolves, and a burrowing remorhaz—just because I want to unleash cool elements of *Monster Manual 2* on my players. The beauty of the fantastic dungeon environment that forms the backbone of the *D&D* game is that it can encompass such "unrealistic" extremes of environments.

That's it for this month. It's my hope that by the time I write the next column, we'll have played again ...

About the Author

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